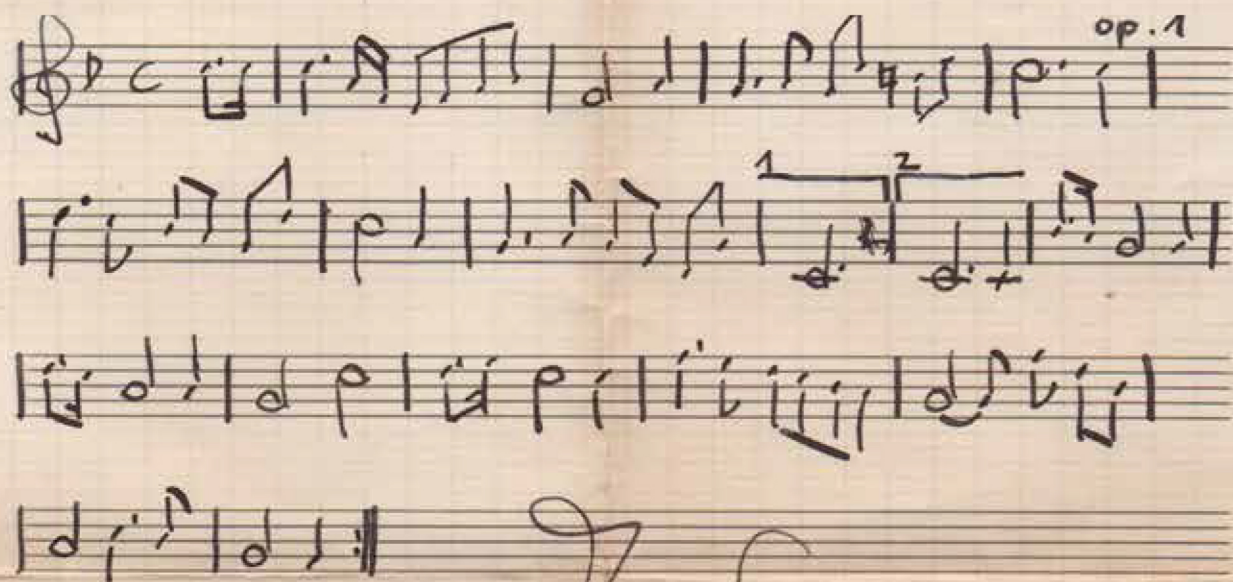


A MEMOIR BY MAX ZILBERMAN

# MARCH INTO LIFE



For Frank's  
birthday  
from  
Max Zilberman  
5.11.1947



WITH BRAHAM ZILBERMAN AND RHONDA NORICH



MARCH INTO LIFE





A MEMOIR BY MAX ZILBERMAN

# MARCH INTO LIFE

WITH  
BRAHAM ZILBERMAN  
AND  
RHONDA NORICH

## MARCH INTO LIFE

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Cover illustration: The music to the song *March into Life*, which Max hummed to composer Peter Lager, 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1947 and chose as the title for this book.

## DEDICATION

*If Max were here he would dedicate this book to his loving parents and brothers who all perished in the Holocaust, and to his twin sister who died shortly thereafter.*

*He would have also dedicated this book to his dear wife Dora and his two children Rhonda and Braham and their spouses Leo and Andrea.*

*His hope would be that his grandchildren, great grandchildren and future generations would draw inspiration from his story.*

## FOREWORD

It's a very unusual situation in which I find myself having to write an introduction to my father's autobiography. After all, it was his story, he did all the work and he deserves all the kudos. However, his death in July 2014, before he had even seen the finished product of his literary labour, necessitates that another describes the motivation and background to his extraordinary story. This role falls to me.

That Max Zilberman (February 13<sup>th</sup> 1926 – July 24<sup>th</sup> 2014) was a Holocaust survivor is true. Yet he was so much more and he refused to be defined by this six-year period of his life. I believe that this book shows almost the full extent of his life, a life well lived.

When writing an autobiography, the first question an author would ask is, 'Why am I doing this?' I will attempt to answer this on Dad's behalf. Dad believed he had a story that was worthwhile and one that he wanted to share. Originally, he wanted to write his story for his children, grandchildren and extended family, but ostensibly he felt his story had meaning for a wider readership. He had a healthy ego and a belief in his own ability and wanted to give it a try. This, coupled with his genealogical interest and computer nous, was enough to get him started.

He began slowly two-finger typing on his old computer in 2009, researching everything himself. Some days he worked for five or six hours; then for weeks as the effort became more draining, he would do nothing at all. Then he would go back and get stuck into it again. All this against a backdrop of him having to care for his beloved wife Dora who was suffering major health issues.

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He never sought help from any outside sources and besides his immediate family, he never told anyone he was writing his story.

Dad enjoyed writing about his childhood in pre-war Poland and I believe the reader will sense his love for his parents and siblings which shines through the pages. He tackled the period in the Lodz Ghetto with an attention to detail and the minutia of life that really illustrates the bleakness of the time. I particularly admired this chapter as many know the historical details of what occurred in the Lodz Ghetto, but to learn of the day-to-day experiences of one family and their struggle to keep the family unit together under the most horrific of circumstances, makes it come alive for us and is, I believe, of great historical significance.

Dad's chapters about his experiences in Auschwitz and Buchenwald are a credit to his great memory and his resolve to tell all about this period. Again, his attention to detail is remarkable as is his steely resolve to survive under the harshest of conditions.

Recuperating in Switzerland is like a breath of fresh air for Dad and changes the tone of the book. Dad goes from a boy to a man, from a prisoner to a free man, and his spiritual and physical awakening and renewal is almost palpable. Here he comes to learn that he has lost virtually his whole family, yet he is determined to push on with his life and look forward. It is also here that he becomes part of a group of like-minded boys, most with similar yet different stories behind them, that becomes known as the Buchenwald Boys. This group, so aptly described by Rhonda in her chapter *A New Life*, nourishes Dad as it gives him a social group with which to identify at a crucial time in his life. Many of the Buchenwald Boys became his lifelong friends and deserve mention by name. Moniek Rose, Chaim Jason, Charlie Spicer, Szaja Chaskiel, Henry Salter, Jack Alterwein, Joe Swarczberg and Simon Michalowicz were some of Dad's closest friends. But he was also deeply involved with the group as a whole — of about 66 boys who made their lives in Australia — and was very proud to be its

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president for many years, officiating at functions, including the legendary Buchenwald Ball that still continues every year. Sadly, many group members have passed away, but there are still quite a few kicking up their heels on April 11<sup>th</sup> each year. Long may they continue to dance.

It would be remiss if I didn't also mention Dad's two Buchenwald mates who live overseas and thankfully are both fit and well. Elias Zylberberg in Tel Aviv was a great friend of Dad's and became like family to me and I visit him every time I am in Israel. Aron Schlomowicz in Zurich, the lone Buchenwald Boy who remained in Switzerland, kept in contact with Dad all through the years and visited him in Melbourne many times.

As Dad's health started to deteriorate in mid-2014, Daniel, Rhonda's youngest son, returned from overseas to spend some final quality time with his grandfather. Dad was getting too frail to work on the computer himself, so Daniel went to see Dad every day with his laptop computer, and as Dad dictated his final chapters, Daniel faithfully recorded it all. He always was under Dad's instructions to change 'not one word'. Our family very much appreciates Daniel's efforts, without which much of this book would not have been written. Dad died only a few days after his final dictation session with Daniel. Possibly he felt his final chapter had been written.

Rhonda and I decided that Dad's story was not quite finished, even though he stopped his story at the end of Chapter 6, *Leaving for Australia*. We believed that several events in Dad's later life were worthy of inclusion in this book and that Dad would have wanted them included. Chapter 7, *A New Life*, was written by Rhonda. This chapter tells of Dad's business and professional life, his family and of course the Buchenwald Boys.

Chapters 8 and 9 were written by me and tell of Dad searching and finding lost family and his March of the Living experience. Chapter 10 contains heartfelt tributes by his grandchildren.

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I reiterate Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 were not written by Max, but I am confident that he would approve of the inclusions.

I would like to thank Karen Klein, our hard-working editor, for her fine work and for pushing Rhonda and I to complete our bits when we fell behind schedule. Also to Anita Frayman for her wise advice and her friendship to my Dad and me over the years. I also want to thank my lovely wife Andrea for her support and literary advice, Rhonda's husband Leo for his encouragement and to all of Max's grandchildren, Adam and Lauren, Daniel and Romy, Sophie, Jake, Lucy and Sarah. Dad loved them all greatly and was also loved by them.

Finally, why did Dad call this book *March into Life*? Well, music had always played a large part in Dad's life. He lived for a time in Zurich with a brilliant young musician, Peter Lager. One day, Dad asked Peter to transpose a tune that he had composed in his head and put it to paper. Peter was happy to oblige so Dad hummed his tune and Peter wrote it down. When he asked Dad what he wanted to call it, Dad thought for a moment and said, *March into Life*, as it was going to represent his attitude going forward. No looking back, no regrets, just positive for the future that lay ahead.

Braham Zilberman  
February 2017





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Map of Poland, 1921

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‘**S**top fighting you two or I’ll ring Dad.’ I was about four when I heard my mother Regina Zylberman (Zandberg) saying these words as she admonished my older brothers Heniek (b. 1919) and Mietek (b. 1921).

My twin sister Jadzia (Jochevet) and I were born in 1926. Our father Abram Moshe was an accountant who worked in a big textile factory owned by a Jew, Naum Ettingon. It was a good job and my father was able to provide for us despite the tough times.

We lived at Mielczarskiego (Szkolna) 23 on the third floor of a block of flats facing a courtyard. Two sisters, dressmakers, lived on the ground floor and owned the only telephone in the whole building. My mother was very friendly with them and could use the phone whenever she wanted, which was not very often, so I knew her threat to my brothers was real.

Our flat had two rooms and a kitchen with a cold water tap, a balcony and a toilet. It was considered better than many of the others which had to share a toilet downstairs. Water had to be carried in a bucket from a pump. Our flat was powered by both electricity and gas. A chandelier made up of many thin glass tubes hung above the dining room table and was connected to both. We turned on the electric light for everyday use, but my father lit the gas lights on special occasions. Wow, what a beautiful light. It was a greenish colour and it flickered and hissed.

Winters in Lodz were very hard. Snow and frost could force the temperature down to minus-30 degrees centigrade. The windows would freeze up and you couldn’t see anything. We had two tile

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stoves which had to be lit every morning with wood and coal. The tall one in the main room kept our flat warm, while the low one in the kitchen was for cooking. We had a servant girl Marysia, which in those days was not a luxury, but a necessity. The wood and coal was stored in the cellar downstairs and Marysia had to carry it upstairs in a bucket.

As spring approached, the snow started to melt and the windows cleared. When I was very young I loved to look out through the kitchen window, or from the balcony when it got warmer. There was always plenty to see. Our building was L-shaped and the courtyard had a garden, which Ian the caretaker tended. It had a high fence and there was a sports stadium on the other side. The stadium was owned by Izrael Poznanski, the richest Jewish textile manufacturer in Lodz. He employed thousands of workers and was very benevolent, providing various amenities including a sports club. It was fascinating to watch athletics, boxing, basketball and other sports. I could also look across to the next building where a Jewish-owned factory produced oil. Horse-drawn wagons were coming and going all day. Yes, there were always plenty of things for a little boy to question.

We called our father Tata and our mother Mama. Quite often we went to visit Mama's parents, Dziadzius (grandfather) and Babcia (grandmother). I loved visiting because Babcia always made nice cake. On the way there and back we saw many men with beards and I got to know they were Jews. One day I saw a Jewish man with a particularly long beard and mentioned it to my father. He said, 'We are also Jews.' I was shocked. 'But Tata you don't have a beard,' I replied. I soon discovered we were a secular family who observed only the main Jewish Holydays. We spoke Polish at home, but my parents used Yiddish when they didn't want us to understand.

Dziadzius was quite wealthy and owned an apartment of six rooms, two of which were sub-let as offices to a lawyer. I remember my grandfather taking me to have a look inside the offices where I

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saw a telephone for the very first time.

When I was about five or six Mama allowed me and Jadzia to play with other children in the courtyard. There was Lola, the very nice daughter of a neighbour and we became very good friends. Tadek was the Polish son of the grocer who owned the front shop. One day we had a big fight and he called me 'bloody Jew'. It was the first time I had ever been called that, but unfortunately it wasn't the last. I didn't understand why Tadek would say that. Tata gently explained there were people who didn't like Jews, but he didn't say why.

On another occasion I had an argument with the caretaker's daughter Hela and bashed her up. She ran home crying and her father came out yelling. I was scared he was going to hit me and raced up the stairs to our flat, calling, 'Mama, Mama!' with him in hot pursuit. Luckily my mother heard me and opened the door. I hid behind her while she asked Ian what happened. Luckily he calmed down, probably because he knew he'd be coming on Friday to collect his weekly *piontkowe* (money from the tenants). It wasn't a large amount, but it was an important part of his income because caretakers were generally very poorly paid. In return, he performed *Shabbas goy* functions such as lighting fires and turning on lights. Anyway he explained what happened and my mother promised I would not do it again.

The courtyard was often busy with buskers and singers. When tenants liked the entertainment, they wrapped a small amount of money in a piece of paper which they threw out the window. It was probably only five or 10 groshen (100 groshen equalled one zloty, which would buy almost two loaves of bread).

Tradesmen and salespeople advertised their wares in the courtyard. I remember a Chassid with a long beard in a typical black *capote* (long coat) pushing a small four-wheeled wagon holding two barrels. He was selling pickled cucumbers for five groshen each. I ran upstairs and asked Mama, who was darning

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socks, to give me the money for a pickle, but she said I didn't need it right now. I started crying and stamped my feet, 'I want it! I want it,' I screamed, but she said I could scream until tomorrow. I learned a valuable lesson: you can't always have what you want.

At home Jadzia and I liked to draw, colour in pictures and stick down different shapes we cut from newspapers. We didn't have much to do with my older brothers because of their age. They read books and went out with friends, but sometimes they acknowledged we were around.

Around this time my father taught me how to play chess, which I really liked. My brothers would sometimes play with me and occasionally I won a game, which made me happy.

The whole family loved music and listening to records on our gramophone, usually on Sundays if Tata was home. Tata had a nice voice and he often sang along to the famous Russian song *Ochi Chornye* (Black Eyes). We had operatic records by Caruso and other famous singers of the era. I particular enjoyed the song *In a Persian Market* and even now, years later, I have tears in my eyes when I hear it because I see myself in front of that gramophone, next to my father.

At that time Mama was the most important person in my life. She was always busy as it was a big job looking after a large family. Lunch was the main meal of the day and I loved watching her preparing it. All the ingredients were fresh. Marysia had been with us for a long time and she knew what to do. The fire in the stove was already burning and she had to peel potatoes and prepare everything as Mama instructed. She took out a big board and Mama started to make *makarony* (loksen noodles). Mama put some wheat flour in the middle of the board, enough for one meal, dug a hole in the centre, added eggs, slowly covering them with the flour and then started to knead the dough with the palm of her hands. When the dough was firm enough, she took out a rolling pin, rolled the dough into a thin round sheet, folded it, took a sharp knife and cut it into



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thin strips. They were the tastiest makarony you could imagine. It was a lot of work, but she never complained.

For breakfast we usually had fresh Kaiser rolls with butter or cheese and a cup of cocoa. Mama cooked different dishes for dinner. On Wednesdays we usually ate sausages with cabbage and on Friday night had a Shabbat dinner of gefilte fish, soup, meat and cake. Mama would light the candles. Cake was customary for Saturday breakfast.

I remember wonderful times during Poland's summer school holidays from July to August. We rented a house from a peasant in Slotwiny, a village about 40 kilometres from Lodz. Another local peasant came to Lodz with his horse and cart to pick up folding beds, kitchen utensils and everything else we needed. It took him a few hours to get back. In the meantime, except for our father who would come up for the weekend, we caught a train from a railway station near home. It took nearly 45 minutes to reach Koluszki railway station where we got off. Another peasant from Slotwiny was waiting to pick us up with his horse and carriage. The station was about three kilometres from the village and I loved every minute of the trip. The peasant was waiting in front outside our holiday house with the furniture and we all helped to unload his cart. There was no electricity, only an oil lamp with a glass cover which had to be removed before lighting. I looked at the lamp as it flickered, forming mysterious shadows on the walls. The windows had outside shutters, which were closed every night for security.

The country food was very fresh and delicious. We ate all kinds of fruit, sour cream, milk straight from the cow and freshly-baked country bread. After breakfast I ran out to play with the children of other holiday makers and of the peasants. I especially liked to help feed the cows and to turn the animals around with a stick when they strayed into a neighbour's field. Often we dug out some potatoes, made a fire and baked them. Yum. They were

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delicious even when the skin was burnt.

One day I nearly drowned when I was chasing a cow and fell into a deep water hole. Luckily, Mietek and another boy heard my screams and came running. By then the water was up to my neck, but they managed to pull me out. Mama was shocked when she heard what happened and I had to promise not to chase cows in the fields again.

Often I came home dirty and tired, but after a wash, a rest on a blanket in the garden and lunch of potatoes, cheese and other goodies, I was ready for more activities. The first thing I did was look down the dirt road for the ice-cream vendor, hoping Mama would reward me for good behaviour with five groshen.

Another thing I liked to do was watch the blacksmith in his workshop down the road. He would stick a piece of iron into a furnace and once it was red hot, pick it up with special tongs, put it on an anvil, hit it with a hammer which raised a lot of sparks and then form it into a shape, dipping the finished product into a bucket of water, creating a lot of steam. Quite often they were horseshoes because the farmers were always bringing horses that needed to be shod and it was fascinating watching how it was done.

At the end of August, we were all ready to return home, reunite with family and renew friendships.

September 1933 was the beginning of a new school year and Mama took Jadzia and me to school for the first time. We dropped off my sister at a girls-only school and then Mama took me to an all-boys Jewish state school, located in the top three storeys of a big block of flats. There were 30-40 pupils in each class and the facilities were poor. We learnt subjects in Polish, including Jewish history.

The pupils came from mixed backgrounds. Many of them spoke Yiddish at home and often their Polish was weak. Some came from poor homes and arrived at school without breakfast. Our teachers asked the other kids to bring an extra roll (Mama gave me one)

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which we put in a basket and distributed during the break. I liked school straight away, maybe because my teacher was a beautiful young lady, Miss Engluwna. Also, I had the advantage of good Polish, because we spoke it at home.

Miss Engluwna taught us a song about a carrot's birthday party and the many vegetables that were invited. I remember every word. Often she started a lesson by asking us what season it was. We couldn't just give the name, but had to use it in a whole sentence. She was my teacher for nearly three years and even now, so many years later, I think of her with fondness and admiration.

Our family observed Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) which took place in September/October. I remember being nicely dressed in a sailor suit and holding Tata's hand as we walked with the whole family to shul at Zachodnia 43. It was a large building with a big courtyard where we played. Often I went inside to sit next to my father, observing and asking many questions, because everything was strange to me. A group of men, mostly old and with long beards, went up on the podium, covered their heads with white shawls, lifted their hands and repeated the chants of the rabbi who was conducting the service from the centre of the floor. Tata explained they were *Cohanim*, descendants of the ancient priests of the Temple in Jerusalem, who were blessing the people. 'And by the way, we are *Cohanim* too,' Tata told me. 'So why didn't you go up there with them?' I asked. Tata said the other men were religious and did it all the time, whereas *Cohanim* like him weren't at shul very often and didn't participate in that way. From that moment, I always remembered I was a Cohen.

The same year, Mietek took me to a picture theatre for the first time. I don't recall the name of the film, but I vividly remember the newsreel that screened first and showed Hitler coming to power in Germany. My father said Hitler was a very bad man who hated Jews. I asked again why some people hated Jews because apart from the Chassids, we looked the same as everyone else. Tata said

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the reasons were complicated, but that he would explain them to me one day.

I didn't give the subject much more thought and concentrated on fun things. I joined a library and started to read books. I particularly enjoyed *Robinson Crusoe* – about an adventurer's survival on an island after being shipwrecked – which I finished in a few days and *The Three Musketeers*. I had a very vivid imagination and dreamed about experiencing my heroes' adventures.

The year 1935 was a sad one. The leader of the Polish government, Marshal Josef Pilsudski, a beloved hero who regained Polish independence in 1918, died of cancer aged 67. This was the first time I had heard of the disease. The whole country was in mourning and portraits of him wrapped in black were everywhere. He was quite friendly towards Jews, maybe because a Jewish family once hid him from the Russian police.

My uncle also passed away that year. He was married to my father's older sister, Sala Rubin, with whom we were very close. They had two sons. The younger one Mietek was about the same age as my brother of the same name and they were good friends. I was too young to go to the funeral, but I went to the *minyanim* in the evenings.

We started listening to Hitler's speeches on the radio. Tata spoke German and was getting more and more upset when he heard Hitler's lies about the Jews. We also read the news in the *Republika* newspaper which Tata bought every day.

In 1933 Germany opened its first concentration camp in Dachau and there was a lot of media coverage about the terrible way people, including Jews, were treated there. The Spanish Civil War also started at this time. Hitler actively supported the uprising of General Franco against the Republican government by sending military hardware and testing its quality for a future war. But nobody believed it would happen.

Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, an ally of Hitler, was winning

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the war in Ethiopia (then Abyssinia). This battle attracted a lot of interest in Poland, possibly because somebody wrote a song in Polish and Yiddish imploring Ethiopia's leader Haile Selassie to do his best to stop the country from being defeated.

The Olympic Games in Berlin also took place around this time and boosted Hitler's popularity. Some of the teams contained blacks and Jews. Many wondered how he would react if they won a medal.

I continued to keep in touch with current affairs by listening to the radio. I remember when the millionth radio was bought; it was big news. Poland's population was then 30.6 million and included about three million Jews.

Apart from the news there was always plenty of music; popular Polish songs and tunes translated from foreign languages, some of which I knew by heart. One day I listened to the popular opera *Carmen* in Polish. People sang *Powiedz mi Karmen czy ty kochasz mnie, ja ciebie tak, a ty mnie nie* (Tell me Carmen if you love me, I do but you don't).

Another popular Polish song contained the words, *Mała kobietko, czy wiesz, e lusterko twe kłamie ci te, Buzia pi kna, lecz nienaturalna, To rzecz fatalna, ach, wierz mi, wierz* (Little woman, do you know that your mirror is lying to you? A beautiful face that is not natural is fatal, believe me). Yes I loved my radio, but it didn't stop me from doing other things.

That year, 1936, we moved to a new apartment at Sienkiewicza 61. It had three large rooms; a kitchen with adjoining servant's room; a bathroom with a large tub and heater; separate toilet and a balcony. We heated water on a fire made of wood and coal. One of Lodz's few parks was right across the road and I played there often, usually with Jewish kids. This area was in the Jewish neighbourhood and much closer to my father's workplace in the same street at number 82-84. It was much better and more comfortable than our previous apartment.

I was very sad to leave my school and would really miss my

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teacher. My new school was near a railway station at Skladowa 15, walking distance from our home. The good thing was it was co-educational and it was nice to be with Jadzia, though we didn't sit together. The very large building was divided into separate Jewish and Polish schools with their own yards. But the only toilets were in the other schoolyard so we tried to use them only when then Polish students were inside.

There was one episode at this school I shall never forget. One day during a lesson I needed to go to the toilet badly. The teacher said, 'Go, but be careful.' I quickly ran to the toilet and locked my cubicle door. A few minutes later, I heard the bell ringing which meant lessons had finished for the break. I decided to leave quickly, but too late. A few boys ran into the toilet and saw the closed cubicle door. One of them lifted himself above the door, saw me inside and started to yell, 'Boys, there's a Jew kid inside. Let's fix him!' They brought some water and dirt from outside and poured it over me. I screamed, 'What are you doing?', quickly opened the door and started running to the yard and on to my class. When my teacher saw me dripping wet and crying, she got a towel and tried to dry me as much as she could. She called the headmaster and they went to the Polish school to make a complaint. They returned with the other school's headmaster and a few boys. I was asked which one of them did it. They were all saying, 'I didn't do it, I didn't do it' - cowards who attacked a Jewish boy in the toilet. It had happened so quickly I couldn't recognise any of them. Their headmaster apologised to me and it was the end of the story as far as they were concerned, but not for me.

When I told my parents, they were very upset, but resigned to the situation. They had spent their whole lives in this environment and were used to Jews being mistreated. However, it was all new to me. I spoke Polish better than many other kids and was well educated for my age, but was just discovering how I was considered different because I was Jewish. I was allowed to walk alone because there

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were streets with only Jewish residents. However we were warned to avoid other streets because we could be beaten up and called 'bloody Jew'. I told Tata I should learn how to defend myself. 'We'll see,' he said.

One day in the park I unexpectedly met twin brothers Marcel and Jerzyk, who were a little older than me. We played with each other on holidays and they invited me to their home, which was close to mine. I'll never forget that visit. After I said hello to their mother they took me to their room and closed the door. I thought we were going to play games, but instead they asked what I knew about sex. I asked them what the word meant and they said it described how babies were made. I said I'd never thought about it, but they insisted a boy of my age should know everything and they enlightened me thoroughly on the subject. They were very well informed for their age and I was genuinely shocked, not that I ever believed the stories about babies coming from storks. This new knowledge was a true revelation. I was naive and wondered why adults would do such things. I decided not to mention it to anyone and also not to see Marcel and Jerzyk again.

In 1937 Heniek gained entry into the textile faculty of a Polish technical college, where very few Jews were accepted. He was very good at drawing and had a draftsman's board. I loved to watch him draw all kinds of patterns, which he said were necessary for producing fabrics. He was a very good brother, was well educated and well read.

Heniek also knew a lot about classical music and said he would take me to a concert. The philharmonic hall in Narutowicza Street was walking distance from our place and home to the Lodz Symphony Orchestra. There were Saturday afternoon music performances with tickets at very low prices. The hall was large and impressive and displayed billboards with the day's program. The conductor was a Russian named Bjerdiajev. We sat down and I looked at the high ceiling and walls which were beautifully decorated



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with ornaments. Orchestra members started to arrive on stage with their instruments. Heniek explained that orchestras could contain up to 100 members, but this one had about 50. The biggest section comprised the violinists who were sitting in the front.

Suddenly everyone in the audience started to applaud as a man with a small stick in his right hand (Heniek told me it was called a baton) approached the orchestra. He lifted both of his arms and the orchestra began to play as he moved them. The melody sounded like 'ta, ta, ta, ta'. I was fascinated by everything, especially the movements of the conductor's hands and how the instruments responded. I was particularly impressed by the violins. Every time the music stopped, people clapped their hands as if to say, 'Thank you, we liked it.'

During the break Heniek told me the first piece was *The 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony* by Beethoven, one of the greatest composers in the world. I had never heard of Beethoven, but was not likely to forget him. I was grateful to Heniek for being such a good brother and for taking me. I think that experience was a defining moment for me, the start of my love for classical music.

I had a different relationship with Mietek, who was very enterprising and would have made a good businessman. He bought and sold things at school, played cards and made friends easily. He would not have been lost anywhere. Mietek taught me to skate, was strong and unafraid to fight when he was called names and was also very good at drawing. Jadzia and I were very close (I was 15 minutes older). We all spoiled and protected her as she was both the youngest child and only girl. She was attached to Mama and helped her a lot.

We spent the 1937 July/August school holidays in Podembie, a popular holiday destination close to Lodz. It was recommended by Mama's younger sister Mania who had a two-year-old daughter and had been there before. I did not like it as much as Slotwiny because there was hardly anyone else of my age there and I had

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an unpleasant experience.

Mania's place had a nice garden and a big yard with a dog chained to a kennel that barked a lot. I was warned not to go too close, but on one occasion the dog was quiet and as I approached I saw a few small pups. They were beautiful and I enjoyed watching them play, thinking it would be nice to own one. All of a sudden the peasant owner came over, grabbed the pups and put them in a basket. When he turned and started to walk away, their mother began barking and jumping around like crazy as if she knew something bad was going to happen. I followed their owner, wondering what he was going to do. He stopped beside a high wooden stump, grabbed an axe and chopped off the tail of each pup one by one. They were writhing and yelping in pain. I was shocked and yelled at him, 'What are you doing?' He gave me some explanation about it not being good for dogs to have long tails, but I didn't believe him and ran crying to Mama, begging to go home. I was really, really upset. Come to think about it, people in those days did not make a big fuss about pets. There weren't many dogs in the cities because most people lived in flats. Every peasant in the country had a dog on a chain, feeding it with any food and bones they could get. Most cats, whether in towns or in the country, were expected to look after themselves by catching rats and mice, which were plentiful.

But a good thing also happened on this holiday. I learned to ride a bike, which Tata had bought for us to use only on holidays. He said it was too dangerous to ride in Lodz because most streets were paved with cobblestones, which were uneven and dangerous. On our return to Lodz, confident that I knew how to ride the bike, I nagged Mama to let me ride in the courtyard. She finally agreed after I promised to be careful. The courtyard wasn't very big and I had to ride around in circles. The next thing I knew, the front wheel hit a stone, I tumbled down and hit my face on the handlebar. I ran upstairs with blood running from a deep cut on my right eyelid. Mama opened the door, took one look at me and started crying.

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She wiped the blood off my face and checked the wound before taking me in a taxi to a new hospital, named Moscicki (I think) after the Polish president. A doctor in the emergency department said I was lucky I didn't lose my eye. He put a clip over the wound and it healed well. I learned my lesson never to ride the bike in town.

The new school year started in September and Jadzia and I were transferred to another school at Cegelniana 63, an almost new, special-purpose building with a gymnasium and other good facilities. We were in the fifth class and learned a lot of subjects. I was not keen on maths, but I enjoyed Polish history and Jewish history and was good at writing essays. In fact, I thought I might become a journalist one day. Jadzia liked maths, but was also strong in other subjects.

I made some good friends there including Marcel Kempinski who had a difficult childhood. His mother died when he was very young, he had much older siblings and his father placed him in a Jewish orphanage, Helenowek, near Lodz. Its director was Chaim Rumkowski of Lodz Ghetto fame. When he was older, Marcel moved back to his father's house, which was not far from ours, and I visited him often. We played games and talked. I think he learned a lot about life at the orphanage, which you could say was a 'school of hard knocks'. I learned a lot from him. I suppose you could call it common sense.

I also became friendly with a boy whose surname was Lampard. I don't remember his first name. He had a very friendly mother with a nice singing voice who knew all the popular songs that played on the radio. Her son wanted a dog, but she said the flat was too small. Because he loved animals, they compromised and she bought him a pair of coloured mice. He kept them in a shoebox in his room and took them out to play. I think one was white and the other one was red. He probably hadn't realised that the shop sold him a male and a female and they quickly started to breed. His mother stopped singing and started to complain about mice

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running all over the place. I didn't like mice and stopped visiting even though I enjoyed his mother's singing. He told me it was hard to round up all the mice, but he never told me how he got rid of them.

Another friend, Harry, came to our class from Berlin. He had very little knowledge of Polish, but we managed to communicate in Yiddish as it is similar to German. His family had lived in Germany for many years and Harry was born there, but his parents were forced to return to Poland because they were Polish citizens. They suffered much hardship, but Harry was a bright boy. I helped him with Polish and in return picked up a lot of German.

*Republika* reported how Hitler was forcing Jews to leave Germany, closing their businesses and sending some to camps. Sometimes we heard Hitler's speeches on the radio which were very upsetting.

A German Jewish family became our new neighbours. They were quite wealthy, bringing machinery from their pasta manufacturing business to set up a factory in Lodz. Their daughter Roni was about my age and her sister Jadzia was younger. We became quite friendly with Roni and one day she brought us a packet of noodles from their factory. Mum cooked them for the chicken soup, but we didn't like the taste, Mama's home-made noodles were so much better. I don't know how well their business went, but pre-made pasta was a new concept in Lodz.

Despite all the bad news from elsewhere, life in Lodz was relatively normal, apart from local problems such as poverty and unemployment. Poland had a new government led by General Smigly-Rydz following Marshal Pilsudski's death. Unlike his predecessor, Smigly-Rydz was not popular.

I started reading travel books about many countries and their good standards of living. I asked Tata if he had ever considered living elsewhere, but he said he was well established in Lodz and most members of his family lived here – two brothers he seldom

saw and two sisters he saw more often. Two other brothers had lived in Dresden, Germany, since the end of World War One.

Mama also had a large family. She had four sisters and two brothers and many uncles and cousins. They all lived in Lodz, except for one brother who had lived in China for a long time and another in Switzerland who could have married a rich woman, but returned to marry his poor girlfriend in Lodz. Despite having so much family in Lodz, I still dreamed about travelling in the future.

I continued to enjoy school. We had regular sport in the gymnasium, the teachers were good and I liked many of the pupils, particularly Bella who was friendly with my sister. We liked looking at each other, but I hardly ever spoke to her because I worried the other kids would make fun of me.

I thought I was more mature now and joined a new library in the building next to my grandparents' house at Pomorska 13. To get there I had to walk down Pilsudski Street, one of the busiest Jewish streets in Lodz. It was full of restaurants, butchers, grocers and street stalls selling chocolate, halva, soft drinks and clothing. Young boys with baskets full of bagels – I have never eaten a better one anywhere – called out, '*Frishe warme bajgiel* (fresh warm bagels), *10 groshen*.' I would munch one happily before turning right into Pomorska Street and arriving at the library, which was often full. Most kids my age loved to read books, perhaps because there was little other entertainment. I was more selective about what I read now and studied the catalogues and watched what other readers were borrowing and returning. I stopped reading so many books about cowboys and indians and turned to classics such as *David Copperfield*, *Les Miserables* (*Nendznicy* in Polish) and fiction by Jules Verne.

After the library I visited my grandparents, who were always pleased to see me and rewarded me with a piece of cake. Their youngest daughter Cesia, my mother's sister, was engaged to be

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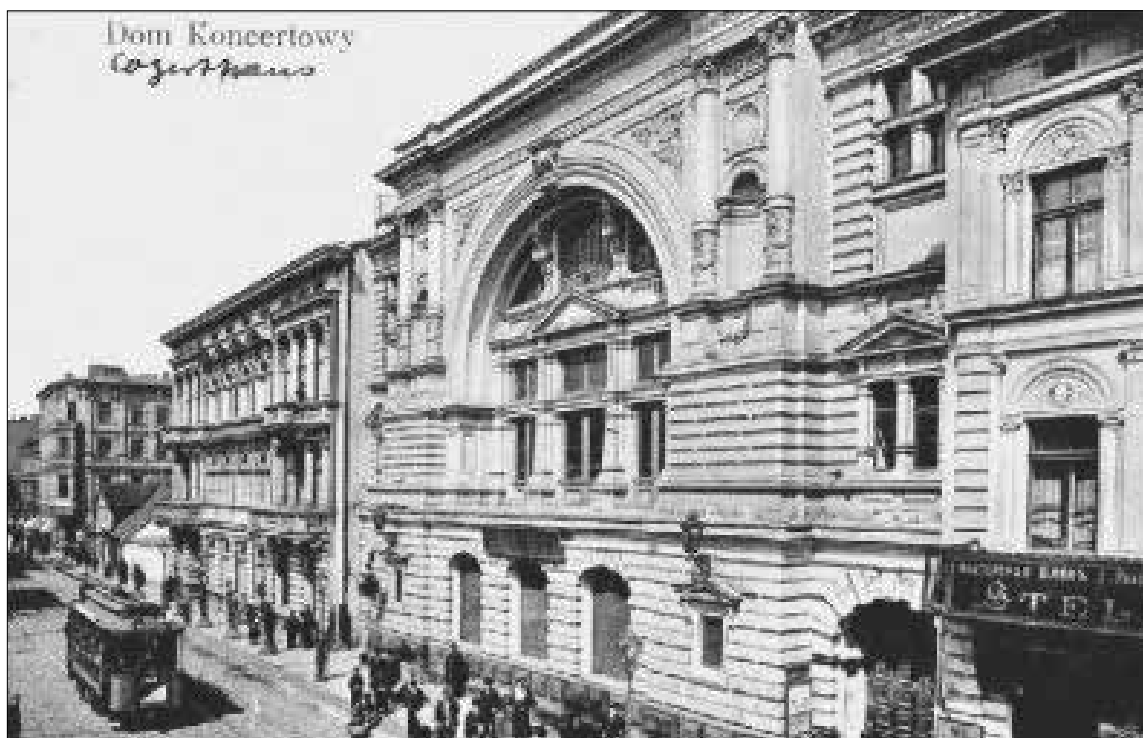
married and still lived at home. We didn't call her *ciocia* (aunty in Polish) because she seemed too young. If she was in a good mood, she would look at my book and ask about school and what I would like to be when I grow up. She approved when I told her I was thinking of becoming a journalist. She was pleasantly surprised when I told her about the concert and Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony. I was very amazed when she told me Beethoven had composed most of his music when he was deaf. I said he must have been a genius. Cesia was very musical and she had a piano and a violin. She said she played the violin very seldom and preferred playing piano. Tata said he'd get me a teacher if Cesia lent me her violin, but when I asked her on my next visit, she said she needed it. Our friendship cooled off after that.

The picture theatre Ikar was close to home and I often went to the cheap sessions on Saturday mornings. I loved films about cowboys and Indians and their hero Tom Mix with his beautiful horse. Most of the pictures were American and the Polish subtitles were minimal so you had to use your imagination about what was happening. The big stars were also popular in Poland, including Shirley Temple, Greta Garbo, Clark Gable and Charles Boyer. The newsreels reported on the violence throughout Europe and on politicians as well as sport etc. Walt Disney cartoons were also popular with Mickey Mouse the favourite. Mietek could draw Mickey Mouse beautifully. The full-feature cartoon *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was an instant success. It was translated into Polish and every kid knew the theme song *Hey ho, hey ho, do pracy by sie szlo* (Hey ho, hey ho, off to work we go).

I developed a fascination with American culture – everything looked beautiful, people lived in nice houses and I thought it would be wonderful to live there. American residents could bring close family members over, but you still had to wait in line as there was a quota. Unfortunately, we didn't have any family in America, so there was no hope of us going there, even if we wanted to.



*Plac Wolności (Liberty Place) with the statue of Polish hero Tadeusz Kościuszko, after whom Australia's Mount Kosciuszko is named*



*The philharmonic hall in Narutowicza Street where Max was taken by older brother Heniek to his first classical performance*



*Sienkiewicza Park, opposite the Zylberman family apartment*



*The village of Slotwiny where the Zylberman family holidayed during school holidays*



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There was a bookstore near home and I always looked at the window display. One day a new book caught my eye, *Learn English by yourself – quickly, easily and pleasantly*, which my father said I could buy after I promised to study it. He was good that way, supporting anything that helped our education. One day he came home with a thick, beautifully-bound book and that was the first time that I set my eyes on an encyclopaedia. I found it very helpful and referred to it often.

One day during a Jewish history lesson a boy told the teacher he belonged to the Jewish organisation Betar, which supported an independent Jewish state in Palestine. He said we should all join. In the ensuing discussion, the teacher told us about Theodor Herzl's vision for a Jewish state. She also explained the Balfour Declaration, a promise by the British government to support such a state in Palestine. A few of us decided to go to a Betar meeting, attended by kids of our age and many who were older. Pictures from Palestine, drawings and slogans were on the walls. It was quite noisy, with people talking and some singing Hebrew songs, which I did not understand. A young man took us to a different room and told us to sit down. I told him what we learned at our history lesson about a Jewish homeland and he laughed and said, 'This will take years and years to happen and besides, the large Arab population there will never agree. Our only solution is to do it ourselves and by any means possible, even by force if necessary. That is what Betar is about.' He also told us many Jews wanted to go to Palestine because of Hitler, but the British were accepting very few to avoid upsetting the Arabs.

We left the meeting confused, but agreed the man's comments made a lot of sense. Some of us were ready to join, but I decided to talk it over at home. My brothers said they never belonged to any organisations, but perhaps that was because nobody had invited them. Tata mentioned a family who had waited a long time for permits to Palestine and said I should make up my own

mind about joining Betar.

I thought about the catchcry of some Polish anti-Semites *Zydzie do Palestyny* (Jews go to Palestine) and imagined them putting pressure on the British government to let Jews in. I was hoping that maybe, just maybe, the British government may relent, which would make a lot of Poles and Jews very happy. But deep down I knew this would never happen.

I attended more Betar meetings, met some nice people and listened to talks about Jewish statehood, realising at this point in time the chances were nil. Still, I thought you had to have hope, especially at our young age. I stopped going, but don't know why.

The newspapers continued printing bad news. Hitler's forces marched into Austria and were welcomed with open arms. More Jews were being persecuted. I was sick and tired of reading all of this – after all I was not even 12 – and decided to read more books and listen to more radio programs.

One day I heard a famous Polish opera singer Jan Kiepura singing a popular song about brunettes and blondes, *Brunetki, blondynki to piekne sa dziewczynki, calowac chce* (Brunettes and blondes are beautiful girls – I want to kiss them all). With his magnificent voice and the beautiful music, it was a winner. He was a world-renowned operatic tenor who performed in many countries.

School hours were usually from 8am to 12pm so we got home around 12.30pm for lunch. As Tata's work was so close he also came home for lunch. He had a two-hour break and went back to work from 2-6pm. Lunch typically included an entree of herring or sprats with pickled cucumbers. We often had chicken soup with noodles and beans, pea or tomato soup with rice and sometimes cabbage soup. For main course we had chicken, beef or goose. We didn't have sweets every day because fruit was very expensive, especially in winter. Mama often used rhubarb, which was cheaper, instead of apples for compote. Oranges and mandarins were very expensive, and bananas were even dearer as they were imported.

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We sometimes got an orange or mandarin as a special treat, but never a banana. It was said that oranges in Palestine were cheaper than potatoes in Poland. Imagine that! It made me think that Palestine must be a good place to live and this could be the reason Britain didn't want to let us in.

We discussed everything around the table, with Mama making sure we ate all our food. She worked hard to prepare the meal which was cooked fresh every day. Food was expensive and not to be wasted, she used to tell us. Many people could not afford to buy nourishing food and went hungry. Hearing that, I always made sure that nothing was left on my plate.

After we finished eating, Tata read *Republika* or rested. This was when I liked to talk to him. Lately he sounded very pessimistic as Hitler was getting more demanding and meeting very little resistance. He said the League of Nations was a toothless tiger, making a lot of noise and achieving nothing. When I asked Tata why Hitler hated Jews so much, he told me it was rumoured that when Hitler was young he wanted to be a painter, but an art expert who happened to be Jewish told him he had no talent and was wasting his time. 'Maybe that's when he started to hate Jews,' Tata said. 'Instead of being a painter, he got a better job as Chancellor of Germany. Instead of painting pictures, he's trying to paint the map of Europe to his liking.'

Mama told us that there were Germans in Lodz during World War One and they were very good to Jews. In fact, many Jews, including her father, became wealthy from doing business with them. A large number of Jews were assimilated and enjoyed a good life in Lodz. Tata's brothers in Dresden were doing all right also, although he was concerned he had not heard from them lately.

On one of my visits to the library I picked up a book I'd heard a lot about called *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Once I started reading, I couldn't put it down. It vividly described the suffering, fear, dirt and slaughter of soldiers in the trenches during World

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War One. Later it was turned into a film, which also made a great impression on me. It made me wonder how Hitler – who would have witnessed the worst of the worst as a soldier in that war – could possibly start another one.

Much was reported about the Depression, with high unemployment and tough times around the world. Tata said many people came to the factory looking for work, but none was available; in fact they were thinking of putting people off. The streets were full of beggars and they came to our door. We couldn't turn them away and always gave them something.

There were also plenty of rich people, many of them Jews, enjoying the good things in life. My street was parallel to Piotrkowska Street, the main thoroughfare in Lodz, where I liked looking at the shop windows and film posters showing famous actors and actresses. Well-dressed men and women frequented the street and met at Lodz's most elegant hotel, the Grand Hotel. The street was full of cars, taxis and horse-driven coaches (*doroszkas*) and was so busy that a policeman would often direct traffic at the corner of Przejazd Street. Piotrkowska was one of the longest streets in Lodz, starting at *Plac Wolnosci* (Liberty Place) which had a high monument of Polish hero Tadeusz Kosciuszko, after whom Australia's Mount Kosciuszko is named. Liberty Place was the real centre of Lodz and it housed the town hall (*magistrat*). I also liked the only place in Lodz that automatically dispensed cakes and canapés, which were delicious. I think it was called Caffé Automat. Cakes and canapes were on plates stacked inside glass cylinders attached to the walls. You inserted a coin into a slot for your plate to slide down to the bottom. Unfortunately I seldom had the money to buy one, but it didn't cost anything to look.

So where did our family fit in? We were neither rich nor poor. You could call us middle class. We lived in a nice place, were well dressed, were never hungry and went for holidays every year. I realised our family was quite fortunate.

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Cultural life in Lodz was thriving. There were plenty of picture theatres, concert halls, sports stadiums and ice-skating rinks. Everything was available in Lodz as long as you had the money to pay for it. Jewish culture was also thriving. Plays were performed in Yiddish and the Hakoah and Maccabi sports clubs were successful. Community events were publicised in the Jewish press, in Yiddish and Polish. But you had to be well off to enjoy these activities. Theatre tickets were not cheap and you had to be well dressed to participate in any activity. You also needed special clothes and shoes to play sport. Soccer was the main game and was often played in backyards or in other confined spaces. Sometimes the ball broke a window and you could hear angry women yelling as the kids ran away.

One spring day in 1937 our class went by tram to Poniatowski, one of Lodz's largest parks. It was apparently built by the Germans, during or prior to World War One, and was especially beautiful in spring and summer when people sat on benches to enjoy the view, as you weren't allowed to walk on the lawns. It was also beautiful in winter when the trees of all shapes and sizes were covered in snow. We were all very excited as school excursions were rare. Most kids lived in high-rise flats where there was little sun and no grass and the only flowers were in pots in windows or on balconies. I was lucky because I lived opposite Sienkiewicza Park that had lawns, flowers, trees and a children's playground and I had been to Poniatowski Park before.

As we walked around, we saw sparrows and pigeons and our teacher pointed out trees by name. We came to a clearing and she said we could play soccer after resting. We were kicking the ball around when a group of similarly-aged boys from a Polish school arrived with their teacher who suggested we play a match. We ended up winning which really upset the other team, especially because we were Jewish. Despite their young age, they were familiar with anti-Semitic abuse. We yelled names back at them,

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the teachers took control and we went our own way. The incident spoilt what would have been a very nice day.

The next day at school we discussed how happy we were to win and stand up for ourselves, even though sadly we were used to anti-Semitic slurs. In my essay about the excursion I didn't write much about the birds and the trees, but rather about the soccer match, expressing my anger at what had happened and stating we should always stand up for ourselves. Cowards are not used to resistance and they often run away, although they didn't on this occasion.

The school year ended in June and Jadzia and I were very happy with our fifth grade results. We had good teachers and I learned a lot. Now we had two months' vacation. Hurray! We used to sing a well-known Polish song at the beginning of a holiday, *Going into the field and meadows picking up flowers and not wanting to open a book for two months* .... But the song didn't apply to me because I preferred fruit picking to flower picking and I was planning to read as many books as possible.

This year Mama organised a different holiday destination, Czarniecka Gura, where we rented a couple of rooms in one of the many guest houses. There were only three of us. Our servant didn't come, and Heniek and Mietek were now working in Tata's factory so the three of them came up together on weekends when we rented an extra room. Mama cooked breakfasts and dinners on a small kerosene stove and we ate lunch in restaurants.

I don't remember much about this holiday except that I nearly burned the place down. One morning I noticed liquid around the cooker and thought it was water. I don't know what possessed me, but I grabbed a match and whoosh, the liquid exploded into a big flame. Luckily Mama just happened to walk in at that moment with a towel and extinguished the flames. I had never seen her so angry. She called me a 'stupid idiot'. I was crying and apologising, explaining what happened. Eventually she calmed down and inspected my face, hair and hands. Jadzia was also crying, but she

didn't say a word. She just looked at me and her expression spoke more than words. It was full of disappointment that I could do such a stupid thing. This hurt me more than anything. Over the next few days I was very well behaved, trying to please everybody, hoping no one would mention it to Tata. Thankfully no one did, although Mama looked at me when he asked how things were.

It was a nice section of countryside with a big lake, where you could hire boats and kayaks. One sunny Sunday our whole family went for a walk. The water was calm and I pleaded with Tata to hire a boat as we'd never been on one before. He told Heniek and Mietek to paddle and Jadzia and me to sit in the front. He and Mama waited for us on the shore. My brothers paddled very well for their first time. We moved slowly and I kept looking at the water hoping to see some fish. We waved at the passengers in passing boats and some of them waved back. When we turned back we could see Mama and Tata waiting. We disembarked and walked back to our guest house, getting an ice cream on the way. It was one of the nicest days of our holidays as it was unusual to go on a walk with my father, whom I worshipped. I met some nice kids around my age and we played games, kicked a ball around and I learned to play ping-pong. I also won many chess matches. I was sorry when we had to return home at the end of August.

The 1938 school year was starting at the beginning of September and I was looking forward to sixth grade, but I was surprised and disappointed by the news that we were moving to an all-boys school at Kilinskiego 63 (which was actually closer to home) and the girls would stay. Again I was sorry to leave because I liked the teachers, as well as the modern building and sporting facilities. I also enjoyed being with the girls, who were equally sorry to see us leave. I had attended four schools in six years of schooling.

Happily, my new school turned out better than expected. It had some modern innovations such as a public address system with a speaker in every classroom so the principal could make

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announcements, as could teachers and students.

Marcel, Lampard (of mice fame), and Harry from Germany were also there. Harry's Polish had improved a lot, though he had a funny accent. I also made friends with boys who were already there. The one downside was the lack of sporting facilities and we really missed playing sport. The courtyard was so small we always had to worry about causing damage whenever we kicked a ball.

I was impressed by our Polish history teacher, a very nice man who was also knowledgeable and interesting. He had been a lieutenant in World War One when Poland regained its independence. We learned that there were many kings, good and bad over more than 1000 years of history. There had been plenty of wars with different enemies, some from distant lands and others who had been close neighbours. The Catholic Church was a very powerful land-holder as were the noblemen (*szlachta*). The peasants were virtually serfs and worked on the land for a pittance.

The history of Jews in Poland also went back hundreds of years. They were seldom treated well, but had always contributed significantly to the development of commerce and trade. Jews were always the first victims in Poland's wars, often blamed for any misfortune that befell the land. Despite all of that however, Jewish communities continued to grow and they produced some great scholars and rabbis, whose influence is felt even now.

One of Poland's oldest towns and its capital before Warsaw was Krakow, where Jews settled very early. By contrast, Lodz was one of the youngest at around 200 years old. Originally, Lodz had a small population with few Jews, but it grew very quickly with the influx of German and Jewish merchants. Many factories were built there and Lodz became an important textile centre in Europe, second only to Manchester, England.

Our history teacher also recommended particular books, including a trilogy, *With Fire and Sword*, *Deluge* and *Mr Wolodyjowski*, by the greatest Polish writer Henryk Sienkiewicz



(my street and the park opposite were named after him). These books were fascinating, describing a Middle Ages period in the country's history when it defended itself against various enemies. It seemed Poland was usually a victim and never an aggressor.

We did not have formal Jewish religious tuition, but we learned about the main Jewish festivals as part of our regular history lessons. Pesach, which commemorates the Jewish exodus from Egypt, was one of my favourite festivals. We didn't have to go to school for eight days, but more than anything else, I loved the special food. We were not a very religious family, but we observed Pesach. My father lit the gas light and created a special atmosphere. It was a lot of work for my mother because we always invited Tata's sister Sala *ciocia* (aunty), who was widowed with two sons, Aba and Mietek.

We had a special set of dishes for Pesach. People with only everyday dishes had to *kasher* (kosher) them. I remember watching two young Chassids carrying a barrel of liquid (containing water I assumed), attached to a wooden pole on their shoulders as they called, '*kailim cy koshern*' (utensils to kosher). People brought down their pots, pans and dishes and paid the boys to dip the utensils in the liquid and presto, they were kosher for Pesach.

I was now 12 and Tata told me I'd be celebrating my bar mitzvah next year (1939) in February. He said it was a very important occasion in a Jewish boy's life and I would have a teacher to help me prepare.

I asked him questions about the meaning of a bar mitzvah and why I had to do it, though I knew the answers as both of my brothers had had bar mitzvahs. Tata explained that in the Jewish religion a boy becomes an adult at 13, after which he is responsible for his actions. 'Does that mean I can do whatever I want when I'm 13?' I asked. 'Definitely not,' Tata replied. 'It means that you are an adult in a religious sense, but in everyday life you're still only a 13-year-old boy with much to learn before doing whatever you

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want. In the meantime, you have to be guided by me and Mama as your parents.'

I wasn't totally convinced, but I accepted what Tata said. I remembered Mietek's bar mitzvah when he was called up in the synagogue with Tata and he had to read something aloud. Afterwards we went to Mama's parents' house for lunch.

I was at a disadvantage because I had no formal Jewish religious education, though I was well versed in Jewish history. What to do in a synagogue was a mystery, but Tata said not to worry as I had a few months to learn.

One day a Chassidic man in a black *capote* arrived at our house and introduced himself as my bar mitzvah teacher. Unfortunately however, we were unable to communicate because his Polish was bad and my Yiddish was even worse. Tata realised he was the wrong choice and engaged another teacher who had been recommended. I liked him the moment I saw him, even though I thought he looked a bit peculiar. He was very small and wore high-heeled shoes to look taller. He had a short beard and wore a black hat. He turned out to be a wonderful teacher and I progressed well, confident I would be well prepared for the day.

As well as my bar mitzvah lessons, I was still doing normal things like reading books and the paper and going to the pictures. The news only got worse. The German forces had marched into Austria and were enthusiastically received. They called it *Anschluss*, which Tata translated as 'joining together'. The persecution of Jews started almost immediately with the Austrians' willing help.

Encouraged by his success, Hitler claimed a section of Czechoslovakia where many Germans lived as part of greater Germany. The Czechs knew they had no hope of resisting and I think they were persuaded not to try by Britain which wanted peace at any price, even if it meant sacrificing the land of another country. Tata said Hitler might try the same in Poland where many Germans lived. The Polish government must have agreed because

we heard much talk about how it was mobilising its defences in preparation for whatever was to come.

Hitler was being vilified in the media and there was widespread fear. Locals were on the streets selling squares of paper with a pig's head in each corner that turned into Hitler's head when folded a certain way. But Polish anti-Semitism continued. The National Democrats (*Endecs*) capitalised on the worldwide Depression – which hit Lodz particularly hard as an industrial town – by blaming the Jews for its poverty and high unemployment. They claimed Jewish shops were overcharging Polish customers and began a campaign with the slogan *Nie kupuj u Żyda* (Don't buy from a Jew). I had heard they also opened their own clothing stores, but the campaign failed miserably when it became known that their suppliers were Jewish wholesalers, who were unbeatable on price.

These were just some of the things I knew because of my wonderful, open-minded family who discussed every subject so openly, even when we were very young. The one exception was sex, though I never understood why.

My bar mitzvah preparations were progressing well. I could already read from a prayer book, albeit slowly. I didn't understand what I was reading, but my teacher said that would come later. He also taught me how to put on *tefillin* (phylacteries). Tata had bought a set for my brothers which they never put on after their bar mitzvahs because they said it took too much time in the morning, so I started with a negative approach. I learned how to wrap the leather strap around my left hand, but I knew deep down I would probably not continue the ritual after my bar mitzvah. I asked the teacher why we used tefillin and he said it protected us from bad things.

Newsreels showed more violence in Germany. The windows of Jewish shops were being smashed and foreign diplomats were crawling up to Hitler, hoping to stop his aggressive ambition. We also watched plenty of smiling Germans raising their right hand

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in the Hitler salute and *Hitler Jugend* (Hitler Youth) in smart uniforms waving flags, playing sport and having the time of their lives. Naturally, they were mostly blond and good looking, as befitted members of the 'Master Race' who were totally dedicated to the regime.

I thought how nice it would be to have such wonderful facilities and fun, but these were not available to a Jewish boy in Lodz. Poland's scouting movement was not open to Jews, who were also banned from the police force, fire brigade and most other government departments. Jews could join the army as it was compulsory at the age of 21, but apparently they couldn't advance past the rank of lieutenant. Jews could only earn a living as tailors, bootmakers, various tradesmen, shopkeepers, clerks, businessmen and doctors or lawyers (if they were lucky enough to attend university, or had money to study abroad), but most were very poor.

About this time Heniek graduated from college with a textile technician diploma and got a job at Tata's factory almost immediately. He was earning good money for a 20 year old and one of his first purchases was a Tissot watch which he proudly displayed on his left wrist, claiming it was one of the best produced by the Swiss. Those were the days when a watch was still a luxury, though alarm clocks were relatively cheap. As far as I knew, none of my friends had a watch, but I had an idea about getting one.

With my bar mitzvah fast approaching, I asked Mama if she thought I could ask Dziadzius for a watch. She said to try as I may be lucky, but her voice sounded doubtful. She knew her father was a strict man who did not believe in spoiling children. He was a product of an era in which little children should be 'seen and not heard'. Not that he did not love his family; he was a good provider and well respected. When he was in a good mood, he was very nice and friendly as I found out on my frequent visits from the library next door. Sometimes he asked me about my religious education. He was disappointed when I told him I knew

very little, but he was happier when he could see me gain more knowledge through my bar mitzvah preparation. Dziadzius was not very religious, but he observed all the Holydays. He always constructed a succah on his balcony at Succot and I remember having a meal with him in there. He was always well dressed. In winter he wore a smart fur-lined coat and a Russian-style fur hat. He was tall and he looked good and I must admit I often felt intimidated in his presence. Despite all that, I promised myself to ask for the watch, but not until about two weeks before my bar mitzvah, so he wouldn't forget.

On the subject of having a watch, I remember a little episode that made me realise the importance of knowing the time. One afternoon I was playing chess at Marcel's house, which was not far from mine. One of us was losing and suddenly the chess pieces were tipped over and we were yelling at each other, 'You idiot, you were losing so you pushed the board.' As the fighting was about to escalate, Harry arrived and we quickly forgot about the game and started talking about all kinds of things and laughing at the funny way he spoke Polish. Then Harry farted loudly and Marcel yelled, 'You pig, we don't do things like that here.' Harry replied with a famous German saying, 'Solomon the wise said loud farts don't stink, but the quiet ones that slide out of the asshole stink terribly.' We laughed like crazy and went back to talking.

Marcel then wanted to read out aloud some funny stories from a book he just finished: the Italian classic, *Decameron*, written hundreds of years earlier by Giovanni Boccaccio, who made fun of the sexual exploits of important people such as aristocrats, rich merchants and clergymen. We listened, laughing and making comments, not realising the time. Suddenly we heard loud banging on the door. It was Zosia, our girl servant. 'Do you know how late it is? We've been looking for you everywhere, your mother thought something happened to you. Wait 'til we get home, you're going to cop it!'

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We ran home. Father opened the door, looked at me angrily and said, 'You little nitwit, we were looking for you everywhere, worried something happened to you. Where have you been?' I thought he was going to hit me. Mama just stood there looking at me and then hugged and kissed me, which made me cry. I apologised and said if I had a watch I would have known the time. The next day Heniek took me aside, asked what I was really doing and said he wouldn't tell anyone. I told him we were reading *Decameron* and he laughed. 'I read it, it's funny,' he said. The incident made me more determined to ask Dziadzius for a watch.

It began snowing towards the end of October and the skating season started. I got Mietek's skates as he bought himself a pair that came attached to boots, which were quite expensive. Most skaters like myself used detachable skates which fitted onto the heels of your boots. Lodz had many skating rinks, some with lighting and loudspeakers playing popular tunes. I was just an average skater, glad to move along slowly to avoid falling and finishing up with a wet bottom. It was very cold and you had to wear gloves and a hat with a flap to cover your ears. It was good to get home knowing that hot food would warm me up.

Again the news from Germany was very bad. A young Jewish man shot dead a German diplomat in Paris triggering terrible pogroms all over Germany and Austria. Many Jews were killed and injured and synagogues, Jewish businesses and homes were burned and destroyed. Our Polish history teacher was concerned about Poland. He said throughout Polish history, Germany was often the enemy, occupying nearly a third of Polish territory before Poland regained its independence (Russia and Austria occupied the other two thirds). We asked many questions and two of them stuck in my mind. Firstly, why was Italy mentioned in the Polish national anthem in the verse, *March, march Dombrowski from Italian soil to Poland*? My teacher said the Poles supported Napoleon hoping he would help Poland to regain its independence.

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General Dombrowski formed a Polish legion in Paris which joined the French army. Later they transferred to Italy and then marched to Poland under his leadership together with the French army as part of Napoleon's Russian campaign. Another verse says, *Under your leadership we will join with the Polish Nation.*

Now we knew everything about the anthem with its beautiful melody and very famous first verse, *Poland is not lost as long as we are alive.* As an avid reader of Polish history books, I was also puzzled why Adam Mickiewicz (one of Poland's best-known poets) started his very famous poem, *Lithuania, my country*, rather than *Poland, my country* (the poem also mentioned a Jew called Jankel, Poland's best musician.) My teacher said Mickiewicz was born in a part of Lithuania close to Poland and at one time both countries formed a union, but he was not sure why Mickiewicz wrote Lithuania instead of Poland. My curiosity was now satisfied and I didn't think about either question anymore.

The end of 1938 was approaching, which meant Christmas and two weeks of winter school holidays. Polish children carried boxes which represented The Nativity, knocking on doors, singing carols and expecting donations, though I don't know how successful they were in Jewish neighbourhoods. Poland was an ultra-Orthodox Catholic country where a lot of anti-Semitic sentiment originated in the church.

December 31<sup>st</sup> was called Sylvester and many people were celebrating, hoping for a better year. I remember Heniek getting ready for a dance, smartly dressed with well-polished shoes and not a hair out of place. He was blond and good looking, proudly sporting his new Tissot watch. Mietek also went somewhere, as did our parents. Only my sister and I had to stay home. We welcomed the new year listening to the radio.

I was getting excited about my bar mitzvah which was taking place in February. My teacher was happy with my progress and said I'd be very good when the day arrived.

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Mama bought me a new outfit for the occasion – a blue suit with golf trousers which had a leather strap on the bottom for fastening under the knee and folding over, as was the fashion of the day; a shirt and tie; new boots; and long socks because February was usually cold. I don't remember what she bought for Jadzia, as it was also her birthday. As the bar mitzvah boy I received preferential treatment. Mama told me there would be a small party for the family. Even though my birthday was on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1939, which was a Saturday I think, the actual bar mitzvah day was the following Saturday.

Finally, the day arrived. Mama helped me to get dressed and Heniek knotted my new tie, telling me it was a special art, which I would learn as I got older. I looked in the mirror and was quite pleased. Mama gave me a big hug and a kiss as did the rest of the family and we left for the synagogue.

We walked as it wasn't far. On arrival at shul, we sat down in allocated seats and I looked around. It was a small place with the rabbi conducting the service from the *Bimah* in the middle. No one was there apart from our family. Tata and my bar mitzvah teacher sat next to me to provide encouragement. Finally, after everybody had been praying for a while, the rabbi's assistant called me to the Torah, 'Menachem Mendel Ben Abraham' (Menachem Mendel, son of Abram). Tata and I went up onto the *Bimah* and faced a table holding the open Torah scroll. The men around the table shook our hands and the rabbi looked at me expectantly, as if to say 'start'. Tata gave me a nudge and I began reading the Torah portion I had studied for the past six months. When I finished I looked at my teacher who nodded his head approvingly and the rabbi said *sehr git* in Yiddish and *bardzo dobrze* in Polish, meaning 'very good'.

We happily walked home for lunch. Mama was preparing the table for the evening's celebration when she called me over to say Dziadzius wasn't well and couldn't be at the synagogue, but he would have been very proud of me. He wouldn't be coming to



the party either, but had given Mama my bar mitzvah present. She handed me a little box, and what do you know? Inside was a watch! It was not a Tissot, but a nice watch just the same. I put it on my left hand wrist and pulled up the sleeve to make sure it was visible.

Our first visitor to the party was Cesia with her new husband. She did not give me the violin as I hoped, but instead a set of Charles Dickens books, including *David Copperfield*, which would become one of my favourite books. Another visitor was Tata's sister Balcia, who lived with her husband in Piotrkow, a town near Lodz, where they ran a Jewish orphanage. They had no children of their own. One night they heard a noise outside their door and found a bundle containing a newly-born baby girl, whom they adopted. As they seldom came to Lodz we never saw the baby. My bar mitzvah was a special occasion for them as they had not seen the family for a long time. They gave me a book by a Jewish historian called Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*. I learned a lot from it. Tata's other sister Sala also came with Aba and Mietek. Both boys were very good chess players and they gave me a beautiful chess set, which was much nicer than our old one. Mama's other two sisters Mania and Etkka and her brother Boruch also came with their spouses. They all had small children, but didn't bring them. They brought more books, fountain pens and other things as presents for me and for Jadzia.

There was a lot of talk and laughter and I made my very first speech ever, thanking them all for their presents and for coming. In response, everyone sang in Polish, *Sto lat, sto lat, niech zyje, zyje nam* (A 100 years, a 100 years, let him be alive, alive for us). This song is sung on happy celebrations including birthdays just as *Happy Birthday* is sung in English-speaking countries. Finally, the day came to an end and everyone left, giving us lots of kisses and hugs with good wishes for the future. Yes, it was one of the happiest days of my life, but what I did not know was I would never see some of them again.

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Back at school, a bar mitzvah was no big deal, as most of us were of a similar age, however I could not resist showing my watch. We now considered ourselves more grown up and our conversations were more topical. We didn't talk much about sport, because sporting facilities for Jewish kids were limited. I didn't know anyone who belonged to Hakoah or Maccabi as the joining fees were costly. I vaguely remember going with Mietek to a soccer match that Hakoah won against a Polish club, with crowd members hurling anti-Semitic abuse at the players.

We had started talking about girls at school and some of the boys were happy to share their knowledge about the subject, sometimes using offensive language. Smoking had become fashionable – actors smoked in popular movies – so it was no wonder some boys admitted they smoked and even brought cigarettes to school to sell. As far as I can remember, no one in my family smoked, at least not at home. I tried smoking, but started coughing after a couple of puffs and didn't like the taste. Also cigarettes weren't cheap so I decided they weren't for me.

The news from elsewhere in Europe was bad again. The German army had occupied the remainder of Czechoslovakian land and Hitler declared triumphantly that Czechoslovakia ceased to exist. We discussed the situation with our history teacher who was very pessimistic. He predicted Hitler would make demands on the Polish government and start a war if dissatisfied with the response. Tata was upset by his comments, but Mama said let's hope he was wrong.

June was approaching which meant the end of grade six. Most children progressed to grade seven to finish their primary school education and then go to work or start a trade apprenticeship. Alternatively you could go on to high school (called gymnasium) in pursuit of a higher education. There were quite a few gymnasiums, including some Jewish ones which required an entrance exam and charged high fees. Tata thought I was a very good student and should attend the Marshal Pilsudski gymnasium right opposite our

house. They admitted few Jews and only those who scored highly, but he was confident, (more than I) that I would be successful. The exam was in June, so I had about two months to prepare. I don't recall any details, except that I thought I did all right. I didn't end up getting in, but wasn't too worried.

There was news from Germany about Jews, homosexuals and anti-Hitler activists being sent to concentration camps. I knew very little about political parties so Tata got out the encyclopaedia. He was evasive about homosexuals, saying only that they were men who preferred men to women. I learned more from my friends at school. The Polish word for homosexual was *pederast* and plenty of unsavoury jokes were made about them.

Then it was holiday time again at Slotwiny. As well as the usual things, we took the gramophone and records, plenty of books, the chess set and even a soccer ball. I was so busy there wasn't much time to chase cows with the peasant boys. I still liked watching the blacksmith doing his work and I noticed something for the first time: that he spoke to his son and some customers in German. I then realised that many peasants in this village were German and conversed amongst themselves in their mother tongue even though they spent their whole life in Poland.

In August our holidays were cut short as we had to return to Lodz due to the bad political situation. We packed up everything except the gramophone, which we lent to friends who were staying on.

There was foreboding and anxiety as Germany demanded the return of Gdansk, a port on the Baltic Sea whose population was mainly German. It was declared a 'free city' after World War One and was important to Poland which was involved in its administration and because of its proximity to the main Polish port of Gdynia. I had heard a Polish army unit was stationed there.

We were told to prepare for an air attack with newspapers offering advice about covering windows and preparing home-

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made gas masks. We heard Germany and Russia had signed a non-aggression pact, which Tata explained meant neither would fight a war against each other – and that was bad news. But we also heard that England and Poland had signed a pact, which Tata said was good news because England would have to come to our assistance if Germany attacked.

There was an air-raid shelter opposite the church down the street, which Tata and I inspected, but neither of us were impressed. We had no idea what it was meant to look like, but assumed it should at least have a solid roof. Perhaps it wasn't finished, we thought. Anyway, we decided we wouldn't be going there.

The end of August was approaching and there was an uneasy feeling. People were worried that war could start at any time, and indeed it did.



*The entrance to Lodz Ghetto*

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**S**eptember 1<sup>st</sup> 1939, The German army crossed Poland's borders and war began.

Radio broadcasts appealed to the population's patriotism, urging resistance, but there was no chance of that. We also heard coded messages that would have been meant for defence personnel.

I remember standing in the backyard, looking up to the sky and wondering about the future. What would things be like in five, 10, 15, 20 years? Would we still be around? I sensed nothing would be the same again. I used to fantasise about living the adventures of the characters in books, but I knew I wouldn't enjoy 'the adventure' of war.

The next day brought more bad news. Germany had bombed Warsaw and its army was advancing quickly with little resistance from Polish forces. Later in the day, we heard an air raid siren and sought refuge in a young couple's ground floor flat where other neighbours were already gathered. First we heard the sound of planes and then a very loud explosion. You could see fear on many faces and women started to cry. Jadzia and I were the only children and Mama held onto us tightly. There were other flats on the ground floor where we imagined our remaining upper-level neighbours were huddled, worrying like us. One of the men ventured outside, returned quickly and yelled, 'Gas, I can smell gas!' We all panicked, grabbed our masks and dipped them in the bicarbonate of soda paste as instructed earlier. But as soon as we placed them over our mouths and noses, we started coughing and

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gasping for breath. Luckily, it was a false alarm or else we would have all been dead. A bomb did fall on another apartment block and damaged it badly. Thankfully there were no more air raids, perhaps because Lodz had a large German population.

After hearing rumours that young men should leave Lodz, Heniek and Mietek left with a young neighbour from downstairs, at his suggestion. People panicked, not knowing whether to stay. The German army had modern equipment and was winning everywhere. Small groups of Polish soldiers came through Lodz and looked to be retreating as it was hard to tell where the front was. The German army was approaching Warsaw and Polish radio announced the city would defend itself and not surrender.

On September 8<sup>th</sup> 1939, the German army entered Lodz and our lives changed forever.

I remember this fateful day so well. There was hardly anyone in the street when I noticed an open car with German soldiers approaching from a distance. My heart was pounding as I ran home yelling, 'The Germans are here!'

The soldiers wasted no time issuing specific orders against Jews. Commands in Polish and German were pasted onto walls threatening execution for non-compliance. Jews were given a 6pm curfew, ordered to surrender their radios and forbidden from using public transport, walking in designated streets or shopping in certain shops.

Food was becoming scarce and long queues formed outside bakeries. On one occasion my mother asked me to get our ration of bread. German soldiers often pulled Jews out of the queue after a Pole or local German identified them as '*Jude*' (Jew). Ethnic Germans were called *Volksdeutsche*. I was surprised to be singled out as I was only 13, looked no different to anyone else and spoke Polish better than many others. Some of the soldiers had an uncanny way of being able to recognise a Jew. I went home crying in frustration and experienced hunger for the first time.

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Walking along the streets was dangerous. The Germans grabbed Jews and made them do degrading jobs, such as cleaning toilets and sweeping pavements, and they often beat them. Chassidic Jews were easy targets because of their appearance. A sort of warning system developed. If you saw a Jew approaching danger, you warned them to walk in another direction by whispering, *Me hapt* in Yiddish, or *lapio* in Polish, which meant ‘they catch’ people.

Things changed at home. Tata still worked at the factory, but he had to be home by curfew. Sometimes he was late and we were worried sick. We heard stories about people being arrested and disappearing. We were also concerned about Heniek and Mietek who we hadn’t heard from since they left.

There were reports that Warsaw was being destroyed by heavy bombardment and that England and France declared war on Germany. We were shocked to hear the Soviet army had occupied eastern Poland, including the major city of Bialystok. The Bug River was now the dividing line between the German and Soviet forces.

Walking one day I saw Hans, the son of the blacksmith from the holiday village, Slotwiny. He was well dressed and with a group of young men. He looked my way, but ignored me and continued walking. I remembered Hans with dirty hands and a blackened face, helping his father. He was always friendly and spoke to me in perfect Polish, but he conversed with his father in German. I was sure his friends were also *Volksdeutsche* and that they wholeheartedly supported Hitler.

The Warsaw siege ended with the city in ruins. The victorious German army marched in and Poland ceased to exist as an independent country once again.

A few days later there was a knock on the door followed by Mama screeching, ‘Oh my God!’ It was Mietek and Heniek, dirty and tired. They had been away nearly a month and had a terrible time. Once they had to hide on the side of the road to avoid dive bombers. They finally reached Warsaw as the siege started, but



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had no place to stay and had to scavenge for food while under constant bombardment by German artillery. The Polish army resisted fiercely, but was forced to capitulate. My brothers decided to return to Lodz, but many others were also trying to leave and the two boys were stopped at German checkpoints along the way. Thankfully they recovered after a bath and a few days of rest.

I returned to my old school where Polish history and Jewish subjects had been replaced by German language and history. These subjects were easier for me because I had learned some German from Harry, however the new arrangement didn't last long. Orders came through to close all Jewish schools and Jews were now forced to wear a yellow Star of David badge with the word *Jude* on their clothing.

Later we stood by helplessly as a group of civilians confiscated two of our beds, claiming they were for new German arrivals. Even worse was the visit by an armed German soldier, accompanied by a young man, a Pole or *Volksdeutsche*, who probably identified Jewish homes. They couldn't see anything in the flat to take, so the German grabbed the watches off Heniek and my wrists. We were relieved no one was hurt.

We were also grateful when no one was injured as a result of another traumatic incident. A uniformed Gestapo officer turned up one night and politely asked my father if he spoke German. When Tata replied yes, the officer said they had arrested a man carrying a gramophone marked with our name and address and decided to investigate if it was stolen. He threatened to take Tata to Gestapo headquarters in Anstadta Street if he lied. (The Gestapo was housed in a new building, previously intended for a Jewish gymnasium.) Tata told him we left the gramophone on a holiday with friends who promised to bring it back with them. In a trembling voice and with his hand on his heart, Tata swore he was telling the truth. Then a miracle occurred. The German accepted his story and said, 'All right then, but if you've lied you'll

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be sorry.' As he started to leave, the German noticed the book I was reading. He picked it up, turned to the first page, saw the author was Sienkiewicz and asked, 'Did he write *Quo Vadis*?' Tata said yes and the German finally left. We all breathed a sigh of relief.

Tata told the story to our German neighbour who said we were extremely lucky. On very rare occasions you might meet a decent German official if he was alone, but when there was more than one, they usually behaved harshly as instructed.

We were also friendly with another neighbour, a widower who lived with his daughter and son-in-law. He was very pessimistic about the current situation. He told Tata he owned two blocks of apartments in Warsaw which were not damaged. One day he asked for a loan as there was no rent coming in, but Tata refused and that was the end of their friendship.

The situation for Jews continued to worsen. Lodz was to become part of the German Reich and its name would change to Litzmannstadt. Warsaw, Krakow and most of central Poland were to be called General Government and would be administered from Krakow. We heard stories about many wealthy Jews attempting to smuggle themselves out of Lodz to Krakow, but we also heard that smugglers were robbing them and some Jews were arrested.

We had lost contact with most of our relatives since the war started, but one day Mama and I met her sister Cesia in the street. Cesia told us that she and her husband, Mania and her husband and daughter and Dziadzius and Babcia were moving to Warsaw where they thought it would be safer. Mama was shocked, but it was their decision. We never heard from them again. Apparently many young people were moving to Russian-occupied Poland where they believed Jews were treated like everyone else and certainly better than under the Germans.

Many of Mietek's friends and their families were also leaving. Tata's sister Sala came over one day in a panic because her older son Aba had left and her second son Mietek wanted to join him,

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but was reluctant to leave her alone in Lodz. My brother Mietek decided to leave and suggested we should do the same because he could only see a tragic future based on the Germans' actions so far. Tata promised my cousin he'd care for Sala. The two Mieteks decided to go to the Russian-ruled area and I remember Mama sobbing when we said goodbye. We received a letter from my brother telling us they arrived safely and he got a job at a railway workshop in a town called Slonim, but after that we never heard from him again.

Unexpectedly we received a letter from one of Tata's brothers who lived in Dresden, Germany. I don't recall the contents, but distinctly remember the reply address on the back of the envelope, 52 Strehleener Strasse. Imagine me recalling this obscure detail in the middle of such a traumatic time.

November 1939 brought more terrible news: the Jews of Lodz were being relocated to Baluty, a slum area which housed the city's poorest residents, mainly Jews. The deadline was February 1940, so we had only about three months to find accommodation and move our belongings. There were six of us now including aunt Sala, so it wouldn't be easy.

Tata's job was ending because his factory now had a German manager. This was the situation in all Jewish businesses. Tata told Mama to fill the big 'holiday' basket with all our valuables including her fur coat and family photo album. He said he knew a hiding place in the factory to keep them safe until after the war. Tata's trusted young Polish assistant collected the basket and my brother's bike, which he promised to return after the war.

The designated area for Jews was to be called Litzmannstadt Ghetto. The Germans wanted the Council of the Jews to manage administration and nominated Chaim Rumkowski as its leader. He went to work quickly and opened an office providing information about accommodation within the ghetto. Poles living in the area had to vacate their dwellings and some Jews moved in straight away.

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By January 1940 we were preparing to move into the ghetto. It was freezing and the streets were covered with snow. Jews used all means of transport to get there. Even young children and old people pushed and pulled carriages that were piled high with furniture, bedding, clothing and other belongings. Everyone was cold and miserable.

We hadn't yet found a place to live, but heard about a woman with rooms to let at Limanowskiego 26 and I went with Tata to inspect them. On the way we saw workmen erecting fences to enclose the ghetto area.

We arrived at the building and our first impression was terrible. The sun hardly reached the cobblestone yard. The toilets and rubbish area were at the back. Sickly-looking children ran around playing. Water had to be carried by bucket from a single, hand-operated pump that served all the flats. We went up to the second floor. It had a long, dark corridor which was very poorly lit, making room numbers barely visible. A young woman with a little boy answered the door and invited us inside. Her husband had gone to the Russian-controlled area, but she hoped he would return soon. In the meantime, she planned to earn income by moving into the kitchen and letting out her bedroom. Tata didn't know how we would all fit into one room, but it was already January and there was nothing better available, so he accepted her offer and promised to move in as soon as possible. We left with mixed feelings. Tata looked miserable and said maybe we would have been better off moving to the Russian side with Mietek. I grabbed his hand and tried to cheer him up. 'No Tata, you did the right thing by wanting to keep us together.' I had tears in my eyes, but didn't want him to see them.

As we walked towards home we were surrounded by police and soldiers with guns and whips, shouting and hitting people. The soldiers formed us into columns and marched us to the Gestapo headquarters in Anstadta Street. Some of the men were put into

buses which drove away. Who knows what happened to them? The rest of us were left standing. It was very cold and children were crying. Then some men took pictures of us and we were ordered to run home. It was late in the evening, past curfew time, and we had a long way to travel so we stopped at the home of Mama's uncle in Pomorska Street. We spent the night there and Mama was beside herself with worry when we finally reached home the next morning.

The streets were becoming more dangerous. Food was scarcer and it was time to move. We took the minimum: clothing, cooking utensils, folding beds, bedding, chairs and a small table. Tata got a carpenter to make a sleigh from wooden boards which we loaded to the maximum. He attached a rope and Heniek pulled as Jadzia and I pushed. It was hard going despite the slippery road and we were exhausted by the time we arrived at Limanowskiego Street. We made three trips upstairs and the bedroom was half full with our stuff. Our landlady was not impressed and wanted more money. Tata agreed, knowing it would be a temporary arrangement as he had secured a job with the newly-established ghetto housing office.

We left our beautiful Sienkiewicza Street flat full of furniture and other items, though I managed to take some books. 'I worked hard for all that, but never mind, if we survive this, we'll get better things,' Tata said. We took one last look and locked the door. Tata put the keys in his pocket. The Polish caretaker – who had already helped himself to the contents of the other Jewish tenants' flats – asked for our keys which he was collecting for the German authorities. 'I left them in the door,' Tata told him. As we walked away, Tata said, 'Let the bastard break down the door if he wants to get in.' I had never heard Tata talk like that, but I fully agreed with him.

Our new landlady cried a lot. Often when feeding her little boy, she yelled at him in Yiddish, *shling arup, geflinker!* (swallow quickly) as she pushed a spoon down his mouth. The poor kid could sense that she was unhappy, so he cried a lot too. It was difficult all sleeping together on the floor of one room. We shared

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the kitchen with our landlady who told us about her hard life. She had lived there since marrying as it was all they could afford. Her little boy was pale and skinny. Her position had worsened since the war started. She was left behind in a hopeless situation by her husband who was earning very little money. From her description, we concluded he was not much of a husband, or a man.

The short time we lived in that flat was very revealing as it showed me how poor Jews lived before the war. I met boys of my age who had always lived there and attended a public school like me, but also went to Cheder (Jewish religious school). They spoke mostly Yiddish at home, so their Polish was poor, though my Yiddish wasn't any better. War was the great leveller. It didn't matter who you were or where you came from, the same destiny awaited.

Tata found a new flat at Gnieznienska 17, previously owned by a Polish family. It had one large room and a kitchen and was on the first floor of a small block of flats inside the ghetto. It was a great improvement on our current accommodation, though the water pump and toilet were also located in the yard. The lady from Limanowskiego Street cried when we left.

There were only four beds, so Mama shared with Jadzia and I shared with Heniek. We all put on brave faces knowing it wouldn't be easy. Aunt Sala was very upset because she thought she was a burden, but we reassured her she was part of our family.

April arrived and the Germans ordered the ghetto to be sealed by the end of the month. They said any Jew found outside the fence would be shot. Administrative offices were set up at Baluty Market and Rumkowski was given the official title, *Der Aelteste der Juden* (Eldest of the Jews). The German in charge was a businessman, Hans Biebow, and his office was located there too. Litzmannstadt Ghetto was now completely fenced and German guards were ordered to shoot anyone trying to escape. Tram lines were fenced off from the ghetto, but the German and Polish passengers had full view of our misery. We felt like animals in a zoo.

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People flocked to the streets as they tried to adapt to their new reality. All the streets were gated and opened only during traffic breaks by members of the newly-established Jewish police force. They were directed by German traffic wardens with brown uniforms and metal plates on their chests. When signalled, the policeman opened the gate and people had to quickly run across. One day I wasn't fast enough and the traffic warden kicked me in the bum. When I reached the other side, I sat down and cried. It didn't really hurt, but I was suddenly struck by the hopelessness of our situation. I promised myself that if I survived I wouldn't allow anybody to treat me like that again. Heniek was visibly upset, he put his arm around me and we ran home. When she heard what happened, Mama tried to cheer me up by saying, 'One day they'll be punished for what they're doing to us.'

Tata was busy working in the accommodation department. There was a shortage of dwellings and many people had to share.

Rumkowski was given a free hand and one of his first orders was to reopen schools. My new school was in an old building in Franciszkanska Street, quite a distance from our flat. The class was full and there was a shortage of books, writing paper, pens and pencils. The teachers were trying their best in difficult conditions, but we were learning subjects irrelevant to our current situation, such as the geography of other countries. I thought we should be learning 'ghetto geography' – the location of streets, borders, rubbish tips, cemeteries etc. We lived in the hope we were living through a nightmare that would soon end so we could return to the subjects we studied before the war. In the meantime we believed anything was better than nothing, even Latin and German.

During these early days in the ghetto, bread was plentiful and the streets were full of stalls. There was a restaurant in Lutomierska Street, but it only served watery soup. Our stove needed a lot of wood and coal so Tata got a small tin stove with two burners that required very little fuel and heated up and cooled down quickly.

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It could cook one pot of food, which was usually soup. We also used the kitchen as a store room, keeping a bucket there in case someone needed the toilet during the night. It was my job to empty it the next morning.

One day I came home with a very sore throat. Mama managed to buy an egg and used it in an old-fashioned remedy. I think it was called *Kugel Mugel*. I'm not sure if it helped my throat, but little did I know that I wouldn't eat another egg for more than five years.

Jadzia found a temporary job in a factory stuffing tobacco into cigarette shells, but the pay was very low and she quit soon after.

The plentiful food supply soon came to an abrupt end. Ration cards for food and fuel were issued by the newly-established supply department. A two-kilogram loaf of bread was allocated to each person every eight days. Rationed vegetables, groceries and fuel were distributed every two weeks, usually in small quantities and of poor quality.

Various factories were opened and were called resorts – tailoring resorts, footwear resorts, textile resorts, carpentry resorts etc. Rumkowski realised early that the ghetto could only survive by generating work. He told the Germans they had a large pool of cheap skilled labour. The conditions were poor and the hours were long. Workers were paid in ghetto money which became legal tender and any German Marks had to be exchanged for it. An important part of the diet was the soup workers received for lunch.

Tata continued in the accommodation department and Heniek worked in the carpentry resort as a draftsman. I went to school for about three hours each day. I made new friends and we met in the afternoon to chat, exchange books and try to forget we were hungry.

One day I was walking along the street and met my former playmate Lola who I hadn't seen since we left Mielczarskiego Street. She was living with her aunt because her parents and brother were away. Mama and Jadzia were excited when Lola came to visit. We were hoping to renew our friendship, but tragically



she died from typhus, which claimed many more victims due to the terrible sanitary conditions. Jadzia and I were particularly devastated as we were the same age. Mama tried to reassure our safety by claiming our situation was better than Lola's, but we weren't convinced.

The food and fuel shortages worsened. The fortnightly ration often consisted of beetroot and other vegetables usually given to cattle. We received potatoes, coarse barley, sugar, flour and some sort of brown grain as a substitute for coffee. Occasionally we got some meat which I think was horse meat. None of this could be eaten raw and our fuel ration was barely enough to cook one pot of food. Places in Lutomierska Street hired out gas burners to cook on while you waited. When we had no fuel, Mama prepared a pot of food which Aunt Sala and I took in a basket. We usually had a long wait for a burner. There were long queues and many arguments. It took an hour to cook the soup, but with travel and waiting time, the process took three to four hours and the soup was cold by the time we got home. Mama decided to use this option only when the fuel situation was dire.

On the way we saw lots of miserable people, all in a rush. There were also stalls with fresh vegetables – maybe they had been stolen from ghetto supplies or grown in gardens. Administrative orders were plastered over walls. I thought the Germans might consider reverting to the Middle Ages custom of town criers when no one could read. Rumkowski was the undisputed 'king of the ghetto'. He travelled in his horse-drawn carriage (*droshky*), accompanied by a Jewish policeman.

Jewish humour was alive and well despite all the hardship and sadness. I remember following some street singers who were performing songs in Polish and Yiddish about current events. This song became the song of the ghetto: *Rumkowski Chaim er get inc klain. er get inc groupen, er get inc mann, far cait in Mitber hot men gigesen mann, haint est mann jede Frau und Man*

## THE GHETTO

(Rumkowski Chaim, he gives us chaff, he gives us barley and he gives us manna. In ancient times Jews ate manna in the desert, now every woman and man eats manna) ... *Rumkowski Chaim ot git getracht, gearbyt schwer by tug und nacht, gemacht a Ghetto mit a dajeto, und er schreit az er is geracht.* (Rumkowski Chaim thought a lot, worked hard day and night and made a ghetto with a diet and he says that he is right.)

Unfortunately, the barley and manna mentioned in the song disappeared as the rations decreased. Mama made sure our family kept everything, but we heard some people threw stuff out. We were getting used to the cramped conditions and sat on beds around a small table, eating our evening 'one pot' meal, usually soup with a slice of bread. I was a growing boy and was always hungry. One night I asked for more. Mama had a pained face as she said gently, 'There is no more, but you can have some of mine.' When I declined, she said our next ration wasn't due for another week and it was better to eat a little every day rather than a lot at once and then starve until the next ration.' I realised I was lucky to be a part of a strong family unit with a mother managing so well in a terrible situation. I never asked for more food again.

I was glad to have books to read. Often I sat on the floor because it had the best light from a small table lamp. The choice was limited so I was prepared to read any book, even if it was too difficult or unsuitable for a 14 year old. Maybe that's why I finally read Graetz's *History of the Jews*. After reading about and discussing the long tragic history of the Jewish people, we all concluded nothing could compare with the tragedy that was unfolding right now – and we didn't even know its extent!

A former church office was the ghetto headquarters of the German criminal police, the *Kripo*. Staffed mostly by local Germans who spoke Polish and Yiddish, it was the residents' nightmare. The *Kripo* crisscrossed the streets in horse-drawn carriages. They claimed Jewish informers told them who was



*Busy street scene, Lodz Ghetto, 1942*



*The footbridge over Zgierska Street which joined the two parts of the ghetto*



*Heniek Zylberman's ghetto work card, which contains  
Max's only photo of his brother*

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**ARBEITSAMT-GETTO**

**Legitimations-Karte**

Arbeiter Nr.: 3079

Name: Zylberman

Vorname: Heniek

geb.: 11.2.1919

wohnh.: Gnesenerstr. 17/7

ist in dem Betrieb Nr.: 35

Kleinmöbelfabrik

Zeichner

als:

beschäftigt

Tag d. Antritts d. Beschäftigung:

Es bleibt darf die Strasse innerhalb des  
Tages auch nach der Sperrstunde passieren.

**Arbeitsamt-Getto**

Kontrolliert durch: Max Nr. 70.002

**ARBEITSAMT-GETTO**

Kleinmöbelfabrik  
35  
Litzmannstadt-Getto

Heniek Zylberman

Unterschrift d. Anstellenden

Twinger

Unterschrift d. Betriebsleiters

Litzmannstadt-Getto, 21. JULI 1943

*Families line up at a soup kitchen.*

## MARCH INTO LIFE

rich before the war and they tortured people until they confessed where their valuables were hidden. Groups of ghetto residents demolished the buildings of rich Jews as the Germans believed there were riches concealed inside walls and under floors. Some people had nothing to disclose, but the Germans didn't believe them and beat them to death.

Our street was a hive of activity. A criminal court and old people's home opened close by. I asked Tata why we needed a court when we were all in the same situation. Tata explained that in desperate times, people stole and cheated to survive. I was quickly losing any illusions about Jews presenting a united front against the Germans. The object of most crime was to get food, often perpetrated by people working in distribution places, kitchens or bakeries. There was great temptation to take something home for the family. Penalties varied from losing your job to facing court. You then had a criminal record and would be placed on a list for deportation to an unknown destination. It's easy to condemn these actions, but maybe we would have done the same if we had the opportunity.

The 1940-1941 winter was very cold. Our only source of heat was the stove, around which we huddled for one hour each day while Mama cooked dinner. Often we ate dressed in coats and gloves. Our bed was so cramped that Heniek and I had to turn over together, but it was one way of keeping each other warm. The toilet froze, making it hard to empty the bucket of night waste, but at least the frost killed the bugs. As Spring approached and the snow began to melt, dirt from overflowing toilets seeped onto the streets making them wet and slippery. All this, together with hunger, fear and hopelessness, contributed to the general feelings of misery and pessimism.

Some people received better rations because of their type of work or position. All I remember is our family having to survive on a basic ration which was getting harder and harder all the time.

## THE GHETTO

Work was scarce in the early days as there were few factories. Tata and Heniek got soup at work and Jadzia and I had some at school, but Mama and Aunt Sala missed out altogether.

Children's holiday camps called *Kolonias* were established at Marysin, an area with open spaces. They provided a few days of rest and better food. I don't recall how you qualified, but I was lucky enough to spend a few days there. The only thing that sticks in my memory are the words of a sad song I heard there, *Zal, zal, zal Kolonji, zal, zal dni minionych. Serce placze, dusza placze, juz cie wiencej nie zobacze. Hej, hej kolonisci, balaganu spejalisci, dzis kolonje opuszczamy i do domu powracamy* (Sorry, sorry, about days gone by, my heart is crying and my soul is crying because we won't see each other again, as we are leaving today to go back home).

Back at home, actors, musicians and writers created cultural activity, presenting concerts and theatrical performances. I remember attending a Yiddish revue and a particular scene that mirrored ghetto life. A girl danced around a young boy singing, '*Vest lachen, vest lachen, Avremele, vest lachen, ich hob far dir gor a voile zach.*' The boy answered, '*Ich derman zech di trojerigste zachen; der Tate is toit und di Mame is krank, in ich bin hungerik-to vi azoj can ich lachen.*' Then the girl repeated her verse, went away and returned with a bag in her hand singing, '*A zemele mit pyter, a zemele mit pyter*' ('You will laugh Avremele, you will laugh, because I have something special for you.' The boy answers, 'My father is dead and my mother is sick and I am hungry, so how can I laugh?' She sings, 'A roll with butter, a roll with butter.') The scene ends with the smiling-faced boy eating a roll. Come to think about it, a buttered roll would have also put a smile on my face as it was very hard to get.

Tata came home one day telling us he'd heard that schools would be closed to accommodate newcomers. The rumour was confirmed the next day at school. We were all very upset because despite the difficult conditions, we managed to learn and getting soup was

important. I had made many friends and we continued meeting to cheer each other up, with hopes for a better future. We also exchanged books and promised to meet again as often as possible.

Now there were four of us cooped up in our little flat with nothing to do all day: Mama, Aunt Sala, Jadzia and me. We were always hungry and I was angry – sometimes unreasonably – that I was only 15 and didn't have enough to eat. I lay on my bed reading, closed my eyes and imagined I was enjoying a big meal in an American restaurant. Suddenly I was roused out of my dream when Mama shook me and told me to help Aunt Sala carry the pot of soup to Lutomierska Street.

One good thing about our outings was the opportunity to get to know my aunt. She missed her two sons terribly, but in happier moments she told me stories about her childhood. She and Tata lived in Russian-occupied Poland during their school years and they became fluent in Russian. In 1905 the Poles revolted against the Russians and Aunt Sala was among the many protesters. There was severe industrial unrest in Lodz because textile factory workers were so poorly paid. At one protest Sala was marching with a couple of girl friends and they came to a line of mounted police. The police ordered the demonstrators to disperse and started shooting when they didn't obey. The girls managed to run away. My grandparents were very upset and warned Aunt Sala not to get involved, but she didn't listen; she was rebellious and always did her own thing.

One time, Aunt Sala and I had to pass Bazaar Square, which had the biggest bargains and was a hive of activity before the war, but on this day it was strangely quiet and people were rushing by, looking fearful. When we reached the square we saw why: men were hanging from the gallows with a sign, 'Punishment for stealing and sabotage'. I was frozen in shock. Aunt Sala grabbed my hand and we ran home. Mama said I may see more terrible things, but we must be strong to survive. Her reassuring words helped me a

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little, but I couldn't erase the picture of the gallows from my mind. Tata said hopefully in the near future the Germans would hang for the bad things they were doing to the Jews. He reminded us that throughout Jewish history the Jews' enemies always came to a bad end. I really wanted to believe him.

Tata found me a job in an electrical workshop, which meant I would get soup, my ration was secure and I had less chance of being deported. The workshop serviced motors and installed factory lights. Tata said that I might learn a useful trade for after the war. He was certainly an optimist. The workshop was situated at Smugowa Street 12, on the first floor of an old factory. I walked in nervously. It was very noisy. Men of different ages in overalls were working at benches stacked with motors, wires and tools. I was approached by a foreman who found a young man to look after me. We walked to his bench and he reassured me I would soon learn what to do by first assisting others. At first it was hard to get used to the swearing and rough language – I was like an innocent babe – but I adapted pretty quickly, though I never spoke like that at home.

One day the foreman told me to help a man called Lewin install a motor. Lewin looked at me disapprovingly as we loaded the trolley. He pulled and I pushed until we reached a courtyard at a block of flats. Most of our water was bore water and here was an opportunity to see how it worked. A crowd gathered complaining there was no water. Lewin promised the problem would soon be fixed and asked some men to keep everyone away while he opened a metal door on the ground. I looked in and nearly fainted when I saw the motor was on a wooden platform at the bottom of a 10-metre pit. Lewin attached a rope to the new motor which we slowly lowered until it rested on the platform. He put the bag of tools on his back and told me to follow. He went down a narrow ladder and called me down. 'I can't, I'm scared,' I said. But he said if I didn't, he'd tell the foreman I was unsuitable for the job. That did



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the trick. I lowered myself gingerly onto the ladder, knowing that one wrong step could mean death. When I reached the platform I noticed deep water below. 'You'll get used to it,' Lewin said. 'Hand me the spanner.' He connected the replacement motor quickly. After we attached the rope to the faulty motor, I grabbed the ladder first and was glad to get out of the hole. People thanked us and it made me feel good. I don't know what Lewin told our foreman, but I never worked with him again – and I was glad. I helped other tradesmen by carrying tools and ladders and knocking holes in walls. Most of them were nice and helpful, but I was very upset when I saw the conditions for many other workers, some of whom were not much older than me. At least we were all getting soup, which was one of the reasons why people went to work.

Tata was not very sympathetic when I complained about work. He said it was the best place for a young man and it could be helpful for my future. I disagreed and said the best places to work provided extra food and as to the future, I didn't know if we had one. Tata was upset by my comment and told me not to be so pessimistic. I never complained to him again.

Mama and Jadzia got jobs in a laundry so Aunt Sala was the only one at home. She did all the housework and often took soup to the place with the gas burners, despite being told it was too dangerous. She said she wanted to help.

We heard that Germany started a war with the Soviet Union. We were very worried because we knew from Mietek's only letter that he was in Slonim, a town near the Bug River on the border, which the Germans would have reached very soon after crossing. We had to hope that he left before the Germans invaded. Aunt Sala also worried about her two sons who were in the same area. She still hadn't heard from them.

Our daily hardship pushed everything else into the background. We got up at the same time early in the morning, dressing quickly

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and barely washing our faces and hands, all without privacy. Before leaving for work we ate a piece of bread Mama prepared the night before. Sunday was the only day we could have a decent wash, although only in cold water. We also socialised with our neighbours, discussing the latest rumours and trying to cheer each other up.

Administration was encouraging people to grow their own vegetables and there was a little space in the courtyard which Tata dug up to plant cucumber and tomato seeds. He had never gardened before, but said it gave him great satisfaction to see something grow and he would try and have a garden if we survived the war. We all said 'amen' to that. Unfortunately however, we never got the chance to taste the vegetables because they were stolen as soon as they ripened. Theft was easy now because there was no wooden fencing – it had been stolen for fire wood! Tata was very upset having worked so hard on the garden for nothing.

My workshop was relocated to larger premises at Limanowskiego 36. Moving was hard work, but the new place was on the ground floor and more user-friendly. Extra people were employed as the workload increased. Our department was divided into an installation section that did all the outside work and motor repairs where I was glad to be working. I was assigned a place at a bench and given old motors to restore by replacing the burnt wiring. It was skilled work which took a while to learn. The foreman was nice and we weren't rushed unless there was an urgent job. The workers were a combination of pre-war tradesmen, young men who matriculated before the war, and young boys like me. Some of their fathers held high positions in ghetto administration or were policemen, professionals or tradesmen. Pre-war class distinctions disappeared in the ghetto. Everyone shared the same terrible situation.

It was a very cold winter in 1941 and a lack of food for two years had taken its toll. I was very skinny and my ribs protruded

through my skin. But mentally I was very alert and determined to overcome all difficulties.

We looked forward to lunchtime when we queued for soup, which a woman dished out from a huge pot. People at the back of the queue would ask those in front, 'Watery or thick?' When my turn came, I held the dish with both hands. The woman must have liked the look of me because she gave me a thick portion. Someone composed a song in Polish and Yiddish about the women who dished out soup: *Pani wydzielaczko, chmein nisht kein gelachter, geben sie a bisl tiefer, a bisl gedachte* (Dishing out lady, it's not a joke, please give a little deeper and thicker). Another song was about a kitchen manageress, suspected of stealing beetroots: *Pani gospodyn, vi oben zi di burkes? Rumkowski vet kimen emzi gehn cy dy rozbiurkes* (Madam manageress, where are the beetroots? When Rumkowski comes he will punish you by sending you to do the building demolition work).

Large numbers of Jews from Germany, Czechoslovakia and other countries began arriving and a few came to work in our workshop. They were well dressed and did not look undernourished. We may have been skinny, bedraggled and miserable, but we looked much stronger. I met a middle-aged man whose family had lived in Germany for a generation, but was deported to Poland with his wife and children because his grandfather was Jewish, which made him Jewish under Nazi law. He didn't last long. Groups of local workers were deported from the ghetto, told they were going to other farms and other workplaces. Many newcomers opted to join them, but we locals were more suspicious and seldom volunteered.

I became friendly with a young Czechoslovakian, originally from Prague. He told me stories about his good life before the war. We communicated in German in which he was more fluent. But he could also speak English, so I got my English language book and he helped answer my questions. After getting his soup, he would complain comically in a mournful voice to his Czech friends, *Nie*

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*ma brambori w polivku!* (No potatoes in the soup!) I was very upset when he didn't turn up for work one day and I heard he'd been deported.

December 1941 and January 1942 were very cold and we heard many people froze to death in their homes. The meagre coal and wood rations were barely enough for cooking, let alone for heating.

At work we secretly constructed a wire spiral and connected it to electricity to make a sort of a radiator. It glowed red and produced enough heat to warm our hands, but we had to watch out for the foremen who were worried we could trip a fuse and plunge the whole place into darkness. We became even more cautious after a co-worker walked in limping very badly with a swollen face and black eyes. He said the criminal police were on a routine visit to his block of flats where he had a wire spiral glowing brightly. 'You *drecksack* (shit face), you're stealing electricity,' they said, and bashed him badly. He considered himself lucky they didn't take him away. The penalty for theft was death and I still couldn't get the Bazaar Square gallows out of my head. We stopped making the wire spirals.

Our third winter arrived and shoes were almost impossible to get. The police and other officials wore boots, a sort of symbol that set them apart from the general public which had to wear wooden clogs with canvas tops. The melting snow drenched the canvas and our feet. Our socks were old and worn so we wrapped our feet in rags for additional protection and to keep movement to a minimum. We just went to work and picked up our food rations, rarely doing anything else.

The streets were deserted except for carriages holding Rumkowski and *Kripa*, a black hearse collecting dead bodies and a fire truck. Those who pulled wagons transporting human waste received extra food rations, but I don't think anyone begrudged them that. We called the job *fekalia* (faeces). Sometimes people were forced to do it as punishment for minor offences. Very few

people volunteered despite the promise of better rations.

The man in charge of the ghetto's electricity services, which included our workshop, was an engineer named Weinberg. He was one of the few Jews employed by Lodz Electricity Supply before the war. His son Jerzyk was a few years older than me and was often in our workshop throwing his weight around. He was well dressed and looked well fed. I don't know if he worked there officially, but one day he ordered me to do something and I refused because I said he had no authority. He got angry and said he would get me sacked. I was disgusted that my supervisor just stood by, but he didn't want to antagonise Jerzyk. I went home terrified I could lose my job, but decided not to say anything.

The next day my colleagues congratulated me for acting so courageously. As soon as Jerzyk saw me he said to leave immediately. 'We'll see about that,' I replied. His father's office was in the next building and I thought I had nothing to lose in going to see him. With my heart pounding, I walked into his office and told him what happened. He was a small man with a pleasant face. He told me to return to work and said his son would not worry me again. Jerzyk ignored me from that moment on. I learnt an important lesson about standing up for myself and was glad I didn't mention anything at home. Later I mentioned the incident to Tata who said I was growing up quickly and he was glad I could look after myself.

I started learning about political systems. The Soviet Union and communism was the most discussed subject as we believed it would be our only salvation. The pessimists thought the Germans were beating the Russians, but the optimists were drawing parallels with Napoleon's 1812 defeat and said the Russian winter would defeat Hitler. We all wanted to believe that. There were a few young men well versed in communist ideology who tried to convert us. We learned about Karl Marx and the communist manifesto. I liked the idea that everything belonged to the state with people contributing according to their ability and being rewarded based on need.

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Aunt Sala said during the 1905 demonstrations many people believed in socialism and saw communism as its more extreme form. Tata said before the war communists were persecuted in Poland because Russia was a communist regime. Hostilities between Poland and Russia went back hundreds of years. Russia was an occupying power until Poland regained its independence and like many countries in Europe, it became a democracy. Communism was a new ideology and Russia formed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) with the other countries of its former empire. Most of the world was scared of it. Communist parties were banned in Poland which ran a very harsh prison exclusively for communists.

However, none of these facts changed the grim reality of our existence. Soup and the fate of deportees were the main topics of conversation. Public resistance was never openly discussed in our workshop, but we resisted passively by working slowly whenever possible. I remember a small boy with big ears about my age who was only interested in work and so aroused a lot of hostility. He was abused and called names, but was protected by the foreman and sometimes rewarded with additional soup. Maybe that was his incentive.

The man in charge of our workshop, Mr Rak, was a good man who was genuinely concerned about the younger workers. He recognised the need for further schooling and thought our trade would serve us well in the future. Unlike many of us, he obviously believed we *had* a future. Rak set up a weekly training course on theory and repairs. Unexpectedly he hired a Yiddish teacher, Mr Wolman, who was also a poet and a writer. Wolman taught us a poem about two ants rushing home because they were late for Shabbat and had a long way to go. I don't know how it was relevant to our current situation, but Rak liked Yiddish and we got an additional bowl of soup for attending. We also learned a Yiddish song about motors that were cold like ice and had no feelings for

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human sweat. We were sorry when the course ended after a few weeks, mainly because we missed the extra soup.

The spring of 1942 brought warmer weather, but worsening conditions. Walls were plastered with notices promising more food to those who registered for deportation. The offer was tempting because rations were getting smaller, but we discussed the pros and cons at home and decided not to go anywhere voluntarily. We were still a functioning family unit; healthy, working and hoping the nightmare would soon end. But the ravages of hunger and deprivation were clearly visible.

My father once boasted a well-rounded stomach; now he was skinny and his clothing hung off him loosely. He joked that if he survived the war, losing his stomach would be a good thing. I remember Mama as beautiful and well-groomed. She was still beautiful, but now her cheek bones protruded from her face making her eyes look bigger. Heniek was very skinny, but still had a beautiful mop of blond hair. I felt real pain when I looked at Jadzia. Her sweet face was shrunken and she looked like a little girl, but she was very brave and worked hard with Mama in the laundry. Aunt Sala, a plump woman before the war, was now skin and bone. I don't remember any of us being sick, which I think was due to good management more than luck. We continued to stretch our rations over the week and washed as often as possible, which was especially difficult in winter when the water was freezing cold. In spring and summer we took turns washing our whole body by standing in a bowl of cold water.

Tata's accommodation department moved into another section of the ghetto administration. I don't know exactly what he was doing; maybe it was to do with deportees' dwellings. Heniek often talked about his work at his carpentry resort which produced furniture and ammunition cases. Mama and Jadzia cleaned dirty linen, including German army uniforms. Sometimes they were rewarded with extra soup for working hard.

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The warmer weather brought people out of hibernation. We seldom spoke to our downstairs neighbours, a couple with a daughter about my age. The woman appeared to be the boss; her husband hardly opened his mouth. Jadzia tried to befriend their daughter with little success. The woman was very pessimistic and told Mama she heard that terrible things were happening to the deportees. She didn't want to elaborate, but when pressed, she said they were killed. Mama repeated the stories to our next door neighbour Mrs Joskowicz, who said they were nonsense. She had heard from a reliable source that many deportees worked on farms and had plenty to eat. Naturally we all wanted to believe her version, but many people had strong doubts.

Adding to the pessimism was news that the German army was defeating the Soviet forces everywhere. The communists in our workshop dismissed this talk as rubbish and were much more optimistic about the future. I thought maybe they had other sources of information and I wanted to believe them. They wanted to prepare us for life under communism after the war. They believed we would be liberated here and enjoy a new, communist Poland. A Polish song said this time we would 'fight for a different Poland, a Polish Communist Republic.' The Zionists said after all the suffering, Poland was the last place they wanted to stay. They would try to go to Palestine and establish a Jewish State. They talked about Theodor Herzl, who I recalled from my days at Betar.

I asked Tata where he would choose to live after liberation. He said he would probably stay in Poland if able to re-establish a semblance of our pre-war life, as he was too old to start again somewhere else. Mama agreed, but added only if the whole family could be together. Aunt Sala said she'd stay in Poland if her sons returned as they didn't have family anywhere else. Heniek, Jadzia and I agreed we would definitely leave Poland as anywhere else would be better than here. Of course it was all wishful thinking, because the reality was grim.



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July and August were pleasantly warm, but everyone knew of someone who had been deported. The Germans ordered Rumkowski to deliver a minimum number of people for work outside the ghetto. He implored people to register for deportation, promising more food and better work places.

One night we heard a lot of noise from the old-age home in our street. Peeking through the corner of the window we saw a large number of elderly residents marching or sitting on horse-drawn wagons. They were surrounded by ghetto police and were crying and screaming. It was frightening. Tata told us to be very quiet, worried the police might take us too.

One day in early September Aunt Sala didn't return from the soup station. We heard the Germans, assisted by Jewish police, were grabbing people in the street and putting them on wagons. We were beside ourselves with worry. Around the same time a curfew was declared and we couldn't leave our homes for eight days. The Germans visited every home in the ghetto, assisted by Jewish police. If you didn't look fit to work, you were taken away on a horse-driven wagon.

Early one morning we heard the Germans weren't far away, so we decided we should have food in our stomachs. We ate the bread that was meant to last another few days and Mama cooked the remaining potatoes and vegetables. It was going to be a thick soup. I wondered if this would be our 'last supper'.

Suddenly there was yelling. We heard loud footsteps, our door was kicked open and there stood a young German holding a whip, his face distorted by anger as he screamed, '*Ihr verdammte hunde. Ihr seit noch da?*' ('You cursed dogs. You are still here?'). He began swinging his whip around wildly. We all bent down except Mama whose face was hit by the end of the whip and started to bleed profusely. We lined up downstairs where all our neighbours were already congregated. Jadzia was holding on to Mama and they were grabbed by the policemen who put them on the wagon. Jadzia

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used a rag to stem Mama's blood. A few of us were in a line facing the German and two Jewish policemen and we were ordered to return home. I thought to myself there were enough of us to kill the bastard, but of course it was pure fantasy.

We went up to our flat where we'd tipped over chairs running out in panic. The soup on the stove was half cooked. I was shocked to see Tata on the bed crying uncontrollably. I'd never seen him cry. I started to cry too and embraced him. He said he had been married to Mama for 25 good years and she was a wonderful wife and mother. He worked hard all that time to support us adequately, but now everything was falling apart. 'Why?', he asked 'Because we are Jews, the chosen people? But what are we chosen for? Suffering?'

Heniek was the strong one. He said we had no option but to carry on so that one day, justice would be done and the Germans would pay for all the horror they'd inflicted. Then Tata said he had made one big mistake which he always regretted because it would have changed the course of our lives. After he married Mama, they had an opportunity to migrate to America. 'Now I'm paying the price,' he said. 'At the time staying looked like the right decision because all our family was here and I had a good job,' he said. Heniek responded, 'Tata, you did the right thing. Nobody could have foreseen that the Germans, who were friendly to Jews at that time, would become our biggest enemies, intent on our destruction.' We talked a lot more and cried ourselves to sleep.

The next morning, we heard a knock on our door. Miraculously, Mama and Jadzia were standing outside with big smiles on their faces. We kissed and embraced them. Jadzia told us she had managed to wipe the blood off Mama's face. It turned out to be a superficial scratch. They had arrived at a place where everyone from the wagons was assembled. German officers and some people from Jewish administration were sitting at a long table. 'We queued up and were examined,' Jadzia said. 'When I told them we worked in the laundry, they told us to move to the side. The majority of

## MARCH INTO LIFE

people went a different way. They told us we could go home in the morning. We slept on the floor and in the morning a policeman told us to go home quickly.' Apparently the laundry was an important workplace. We never heard what happened to the others.

The curfew ended and we were ordered back to work. Mama and Jadzia were very happy, even though their job was dirty and hard. No one was missing from either the laundry or my workshop, but I heard that in some streets the Germans forced people onto the wagons, irrespective of age or condition. It appeared our street was relatively lucky, if you could call it that.

A period of relative tranquillity followed. Things got a little better after the removal of what Rumkowski considered the 'unproductive element'. Rations had improved and there were no more appeals to register for deportation. It appeared every resident in the ghetto was now considered a worker contributing to the German war effort.

In 1943 there were rumours of a German defeat at Stalingrad, which raised a faint hope that maybe, just maybe, the end was near. But then we heard the Warsaw ghetto had been liquidated. Mama's parents, two sisters and their families lived there. Now we thought they should have stayed in Lodz. We had not heard from them since they left for Warsaw in 1939. We didn't dwell on the news because in our current situation everyone's first concern was immediate family.

One day I unexpectedly came across my old friend Marcel Kempinski who I hadn't seen since before the war. He was now 17 and because he lived in the Helenowek orphanage that Rumkowski managed years before the war, he received special rations of food and bread. He lived alone and had plenty of girlfriends. He seemed different to how I remembered him. He invited me to visit, but I declined and never saw him again.

The news that the Soviet army was defeating Germans on all fronts was music to the ears of my communist workmates, for

## THE GHETTO

whom Stalin was the big hero. But Tata was sceptical when I praised the communist philosophy. 'You like the idea now because you are very poor and don't own anything. But hopefully in the future when you own a property or business through your own hard work, you'll think differently,' he said.

I was given a book written by an American communist reporter, John Reed, who had been in Russia in 1917. Titled *Ten Days that Shook the World*, it described the Russian revolution that disposed of the old order and brought Communists to power. It was a fascinating read.

We sang pre-war communist songs quite loudly and sometimes worried that the police would hear and deport us. But we were lucky. A father of one of the boys was a policeman, but he liked to sing and knew most of the words off by heart, as I did. *Die Internationale* was popular and we sang it in Polish and German. Many other songs told a story. There was one about Churchill the villain, who was planning something sinister in London that may involve a loss of many lives, but he didn't count on the good bloke Stalin who thwarted his plans with a five-year plan.

By now I was pretty proficient at my job. I needed a special set of tools which were available from the store. The storeman was a cranky and lazy man with the best job in the place. He wasn't as skinny as most of us, so he was probably getting extra soup. He was annoyed because I asked for a spanner, interrupting him while reading a book when he should have been working.

Conditions improved in the summer and autumn of 1943, perhaps because there were fewer people after the deportations. We didn't talk about Aunt Sala's disappearance much because Tata was so upset.

The mood was more optimistic as the rumours about German losses intensified. Heniek said his resort's main production line was now ammunition boxes and Mama said there were more dirty uniforms to clean than ever before. But we were still always

hungry. The quality of rations varied, but the quantity remained small. Occasionally we got some horse meat. We knew that French people used to eat horse meat, but it would have come from healthy animals. Our meat was probably from old horses, but we didn't care.

The 1943-1944 winter was particularly hard, but maybe we felt the cold more because we were so skinny. We wore anything just to keep a little bit warmer, but finally, spring arrived. News from the battle fronts was good, but we were devastated that deportations were starting again.

We carried on as usual in our workshop, working as little as possible and singing. One song implored all workers of the world to unite because the big capitalist forces were planning to dismantle the Soviet Union. As mentioned before, these were pre-war songs that couldn't foresee that the communists and capitalists would join forces to defeat Hitler.

Then we received hopeful news. An uprising started in Warsaw and the Soviet army arrived on the eastern side of the Vistula River near Praga, around 120 kilometres from Lodz. The Russians could be here in a matter of days. Euphoria gripped the ghetto population with rumours that Germans were panicking. A few days passed, then a week, two weeks, but there was no sign of the Russians.

Then we heard of fierce battles in Warsaw with the Soviets building up their forces, but they didn't move or help the Poles. Perhaps because of the ghetto's proximity to the front, the Germans wanted to hurry deportations. It was August 1944 and people sensed the situation was desperate. The Germans began a new strategy to force people out. They reduced the ghetto area and ordered residents out of certain streets. You had two choices: prepare some personal belongings and report at Radogoszcz (Radegast) railway station for deportation or find accommodation in the remaining part of the ghetto. Our street was among those to be vacated and under the threat of death we had no option but to report for deportation. Mama cooked our last supper from all

## THE GHETTO

our remaining food and we left with a heavy heart, looking to an uncertain future. We cast a last look at our home of nearly five years. As bad as it was, at least it kept us together. To think that only a few days earlier we had visions of walking out of here, free people liberated by Soviet forces. The cruel reality was that the Russians kept stopping, giving the Germans time to deport us. It shook my trust in Stalin, but then I gave him the benefit of the doubt: perhaps they stopped to rescue Jews.

We joined a large crowd of bedraggled people like ourselves holding bundles of belongings and started walking towards Radogoszcz railway station. Some people were crying, others were talking, but everyone seemed resigned to their destiny. We finally arrived at the station after a long, tiring walk. It was midday. From a distance I could see a row of railway cattle wagons, surrounded by Germans. Jewish police were trying to form groups. Everyone was given a loaf of bread which many people began eating hungrily. Then something unexpected happened. A woman with a girl in our group came over and said, 'You don't recognise me do you?' She was middle-aged, skinny and wrinkled, but there were traces of her former beauty. Then it dawned on me. 'Yes, you were my first primary school teacher, Miss Engluwna.' I called out, 'I used to love you.' She smiled and said, 'Yes, you were a good boy.' Her daughter pulled her hand and that was the end of our conversation.

We were ordered to stand. Some people were still eating their bread. The policemen in front of each group approached the wagons. It was mid-August 1944.



*A group of children in the ghetto*



*Waste removers had the worst job in the ghetto and often received extra rations.*



*A deportation from the ghetto*





*Entrance to Buchenwald*

## THE CAMPS

**W**e got inside one of the wagons, carrying our few possessions and what was left of the bread and secured a spot under one of the windows which was covered by barbed wire. We were packed in like sardines. The wagon door slammed shut with a clang. We heard a whistle and the train began to move. My head was full of ghetto rumours: Are we going to work on farms or in factories? Are we going to be killed? The sights of Lodz were fading and all we could see was blue sky. It was getting very hot and people were calling for water. Children were crying and arguments broke out as people relieved themselves. Eventually the 'ta, ta, ta' sound of the wheels put some people to sleep and it wasn't so noisy.

I looked at Mama who had her arm around Jadzia and a worried look on her face. Our eyes met, but we didn't speak. I was sitting next to Tata and we didn't speak either. Heniek was standing at the window and told us he could see farmers, fields and villages – all peaceful images. It was hard to imagine this hell train travelling through such beautiful scenery. It was getting dark and there was no sign of our destination. Every now and again the train driver blew a whistle, as if to signal he knew where we were going. Suddenly Heniek yelled, 'I can see some lights. They're getting closer and closer!' Everyone started moving and getting up. 'Where are we? What's the name of this place?' they asked. The train blew a final whistle as it slowed to stop.

There was a lot of noise outside: screaming, dogs barking,

## MARCH INTO LIFE

German cursing. Suddenly our door was wide open and a German soldier with some men in striped suits was yelling, *Raus, raus, schnell!* (Out, out quick!). He hooked a stick with a curved handle around the neck of some poor man and brought him crashing down to the ground. The door was about a metre above the ground, but people were jumping out in panic. Some of the women were helped by the men in striped suits. An announcement came through the public address system, *Frauen links, männer rechts!* (Women left, men right). I saw Mama and Jadzia being herded away from us with the other women. Mama turned around and waved. I never saw her again.

Tata, Heniek and I joined the other men and were forced to a well-lit area where German officers were directing people to the left or to the right. A spectacled officer looked us over and waved his gloved finger to the right and we quickly joined others who appeared younger and healthier. I noticed the men sent to the left were older and looked less fit.

After the selection, we were marched to a big hall where the floor was covered in clothing. A German holding a whip ordered us to strip and go into another room where men in the striped suits with shavers and razors were waiting to shave all our body hair. It was easy for me because I was a skinny kid with only hair on my head. But I was upset watching Tata undergoing such degrading treatment. Heniek's mop of beautiful blond hair came off quickly, but he was philosophical. 'It will grow again,' he said. There were screams as some men were cut. A man with a large hernia was bleeding profusely and taken away. When everybody was done, we were ordered to dress quickly. The men who shaved us climbed on top of the piles of clothing and started throwing pants, shirts, jackets, jumpers and underwear. We grabbed what we could. A tall man with short pants exchanged them with a small man with long pants. We were in mismatched clothes and looked grotesque, but it didn't matter, we were alive!

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We were taken to dimly-lit barracks and ordered to lie down on the concrete floor. I was squeezed between Tata and Heniek in a most uncomfortable position and my skinny bones were aching. Suddenly a man in a striped suit started running backwards and forwards along a narrow raised platform which ran the full length of the barracks. He held a stick and was yelling and cursing in Yiddish, 'You bastards, you sons of bitches, we know you brought gold and diamonds. Give it all up now because if we find it on you later, you'll be killed.' We were already so frightened his threats were meaningless and no one got up. After a while, he changed his tune and in a soft voice he asked, 'Can anyone sing? I'll give him some bread.'

At first there was no response, but then a young boy about my age stood up on the platform and sang a beautiful Polish song about a fair maiden sitting on the bank of the Vistula River, making flower wreaths and throwing them into quick-flowing water. He had such a beautiful voice. Could he be an angel singing in hell? It got quiet and the man took the boy away to give him bread we hoped. The lights went out and we settled in for an uneasy night's sleep.

We awoke early in the morning to *Auf stehen, schnell!* (Get up, quickly!) We left the barracks not knowing what to do or what to expect so we sat down against the wall. Men from another barracks said they'd been there for days and told us factory representatives would be coming to choose workers. A man next to us was a smart ass. He claimed that as we had travelled only about eight to nine hours, we should be not far from Warsaw, which meant Soviet forces were close and could arrive soon. So Tata asked him, 'How come they still have time to do these terrible things to us?' He didn't reply.

Some official-looking men arrived to ask everyone about their trade and work history. One of them pointed a finger at me and said to come with him. Tata protested, 'Please, the three of us are a family, can we go together?' 'No, I only want him.' It happened

## MARCH INTO LIFE

so suddenly. My heart pounded as the man grabbed my hand and started walking. 'Tata, Tata,' I called, stretching my other hand towards him. But the man kept pulling me along. We turned a corner and I lost sight of them. I was sobbing. He said, 'Don't worry, you'll be fine.'

I joined a group of boys about the same age as me. The man told me to wait with them. After a while we saw a horse-driven carriage with four officers inside. They got out and slowly started to walk in front of us, looking everybody over and telling some boys to step forward. One pointed his finger at me and I also stepped forward. After a while they had chosen enough boys for their purposes. The officers got back into their carriage and rode away. The man who brought me there ordered all the selected boys to follow him. He took us to a barrack where there were some men sitting at tables with pens, paper, ink and other utensils. We were told to sit on the floor.

After a while we were each called up to one of the tables and had to give our personal details: name, age, date and place of birth and occupation. They wrote everything down. A man grabbed my left arm tightly and pierced me with a tattoo needle. 'Ouch', I called out as it was quite painful. He ignored me and kept pushing the needle into me until the number B-7683 appeared. From that moment I ceased being Maks Zylberman, I was number B-7683.

I glanced through the open door and saw the barracks where I left Tata and Heniek. I pleaded with the man to be allowed to go and say goodbye. He said I had five minutes. I found Tata and Heniek in the same spot I left them in the morning. 'Tata, I think I'll be working on a farm.' I showed them my number and before they could say a word, I said, 'I must go back. I love you ... 'til we meet in Lodz after the war, goodbye.' We kissed and hugged and that was it.

I got back just in time, as they were sorting us into four groups of approximately 30 boys in each. We were told that we were going

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to four agricultural camps: Wirtshaftshof Birkenau, Babice, Budy and Plavy. I was allotted to the first one, but first we had to spend two weeks in quarantine at the main camp called Auschwitz, a place we had never heard of.

We were ordered outside and began marching, surrounded by SS men with guns on the ready. I took one last look at the barracks where I farewelled Tata and Heniek, hoping they'd be okay.

We moved quickly despite not eating for three days. I was part of an outside line. An SS man walked a metre in front of me. He had a nice haircut and if I stretched my hand I could have touched his back. A Y-shaped leather strap ran from his shoulder to his belt. Another SS man was a metre behind and if I made a wrong move I knew he'd shoot me without hesitating. With my heart pounding and adrenalin flowing through my veins, I kept marching like a soldier. On the way, we passed other camps, some containing women in striped jackets and skirts. From a distance we could see buildings with chimneys. I guessed they were factories.

Finally, we arrived at a place with a big iron gate and the sign, *Arbeit macht frei* (Work makes [you] free). In front of it was a boom gate which was raised after we were counted. We marched in and stopped in front of a double-storey building. We were ordered to go inside a big hall with bunks. After we settled down, some men in striped suits brought in barrels of soup and we each got a full bowl, but we were starving and could have eaten three times as much. Later we got some bread. The man dishing out the soup was also wearing a striped suit. It had a green triangle on the top left hand pocket. He told us he managed the hall and we had to follow his orders.

We were all very tired, did not talk much and slowly settled down for the night. I was trying to come to terms with everything that had happened. Only a few days ago I was part of a close-knit, loving family. Then everything was destroyed, leaving me alone. How would I manage? A little voice inside me said, 'You will

because you must.' Tiredness overcame me and I fell asleep.

We were woken up early in the morning. After eating bread and drinking brown water called 'coffee', we were ordered to queue for black and white striped suits with a yellow triangle sewn on the top. The fabric was very thin and I realised I would be freezing with the weather getting colder. I put the suit over what I was already wearing. I was very skinny so it didn't look too bad. The supervisor announced we would be staying here for two weeks before moving to our camp. He said we could go outside the following day. Many men walked past our windows. It was late in the afternoon and again men brought soup. It was good and thick, but did not satisfy our hunger. There was no more bread. We talked amongst ourselves and I met a few boys allocated to my camp.

After bread and 'coffee' the next morning we ventured outside in our striped suits. The buildings all looked the same, double-storey and made of brick. Outside we met some Polish prisoners who asked if any of us spoke Polish. I told them that I did, that we were only in quarantine for a short time and that we were always hungry. The Poles had a chat amongst themselves, looked around and asked four of us to come inside. They brought out two bowls of soup, making sure we ate equal amounts. We thanked them and moved on. They warned us to look out for SS men who were wandering around. These Poles were wearing red triangles which meant they were political prisoners. We were wearing yellow triangles which identified us as Jews. Green ones, like those worn by our supervisor, signified a German criminal. He could have been a murderer, but his nationality provided privilege.

When we returned to our block we found out from some other Jews that prisoners were called *flichtling* and that prisoners in charge of other prisoners were called *kapos*. Suddenly there was a lot of noise and the supervisor who was in a bad mood, called out: 'You f....n Jews, all you want to do is *fressen und schaisen* (eat and shit).' Then it was quiet. We were stunned because we'd

## THE CAMPS

never heard him like this before. He stormed out of the hall and we lay down to sleep.

The next morning the supervisor distributed bread and 'coffee' as if nothing had happened. We were well behaved, forgetting the previous night. Four of us went out again to scrounge for food. The Poles weren't outside their block. Further along we came to a block containing what looked like rubbish bins. It appeared there was a kitchen there. No one was around, so we slowly lifted the lids and discovered vegetable scraps and loaves of bread. The bread was full of mould, but we managed to salvage some suitable to eat. We were almost full, which had not happened for a long time, but we still managed to fit in soup back at the block. We told a few boys about our discovery. Some were interested, others said they wouldn't touch it. We checked it out again another day, but there was no bread this time.

We were coming to the end of our stay and the supervisor was in a terrible mood again. He shocked us by saying, '*Ihr verfluchte Juden! Zwanzig jahre habt ihr huhne gefressen und frauen geficked.*' ('You bloody Jews. For 20 years you guzzled chickens and f....d women.'), referring to the period between the two wars. We didn't understand how it was relevant to us, except that we were Jews. In their minds we carried a common guilt. He told us to be ready to leave the next day.

The supervisor was quiet on the morning of our departure. After bread and 'coffee', he ordered us to go outside and form into our groups. SS men surrounded each group and we were ordered to march in different directions. After a while we arrived at a camp called *Wirtschaftshof Birkenau* (Farm Birkenau) where we were met by an SS man and a few prisoners with green triangles. We were officially handed over and our former guards left.

An SS man pointed his finger at each of us, demanding, '*Dein beruf!*' ('Your trade!') - tailor, bootmaker, carpenter, painter and so on until he asked me. 'Electrician,' I answered. After a while



# Ausweis — Certification.

Herr Zylberman Maks

Mister

geb. am 13.2.1928 in Lodz

here at

zuletzt wohnhaft in Lodz

last domicile

Sienkiewicza 61

wurde vom 1.4.1940 bis 11. Apr 1945

in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern gefangen gehalten und vom Konzentrationslager Buchenwald bei Weimar in Freiheit gesetzt.

was kept in captivity from 1.4.1940 to 11. Apr 1945 in Nazi-German concentration camps and was liberated from the concentration camp of Buchenwald.

Unterschriften und Stempel  
signatures and stamps  
Bortel  
Lagerkomitee  
Camp-Committee  
Military Government  
Campcommandant

Weimar-Buchenwald, am 17. Mai 1945

# Provisional identification card for civilian internee of Buchenwald.

Vorläufige Identitätskarte für Buchenwälder Zivilinternierte.

Current number 19917

Laufende Nr.

Internee number 119935

Häftlings-Nr.

Family name Zylberman

Familiennamen

Christian name Maks

Vorname

Born 13.2.1928

geboren

at Lodz

in

Nationality Polish

Nationalität

Address Lodz, Sienkiewicza 61.

Adresse

Fingerprint:  
Fingerabdruck

Signature:  
Unterschrift

Weimar-Buchenwald, am 30. 4. 1945

This page and opposite: Assorted documents from Auschwitz/Buchenwald, including Max's ID card and list of names for work details

P. Jude  
Vor- und Zuname: Max Silbermann B 7683 Haft-Nr. 119935  
Beruf: Elektriker geboren am: 13. 2. 27. in Litzmannstadt  
Anschrifts-Ort: Straße Nr.  
Eingef. am: 28.1.45 Uhr von KL Auschwitz Gef. am: Uhr nach  
Bei Einlieferung abgegeben: Koffer Aktentasche Paket

Bei Einlieferung abgegeben:  
Paar Schuhe/Gürtel  
Paar Strümpfe  
Paar Socken  
Paar Damensocken  
Kragen  
Hosenträger  
Paar Armbänder  
Paar Handschuhe  
Paar Socken  
Paar Unterhosen  
Paar Mantel-Knöpfe

Abgabe befristet:

Max Silbermann

KL Weimar-Buchenwald

Jude.

# Häftlings-Personal-Karte

Fam-Name: Silbermann

Vorname: Max

Geb. am: 13.2.27 in: Lodz

Stand: ledig Kinder:

Wohnort: Lodz

Strasse: Wilkowskiego 23

Religion: mos. Staatsang.: Pole

Wohnort d. Angehörigen: keine

Eingewiesen am:

durch:

in KL: Auschwitz

Grund: Polit. Pole-Jude

Verurteilt:

mit Verfügung v.:

Strafen im Lager:

Grund:

Art:

I.T.S. 1940

No 000193

KL-S-2 44 500.000

Oberstellt

am: 23.1.1945 an KL.

Buchenwald

am: an KL.

am: an KL.

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Personen-Beschreibung:

Größe: cm

Gestalt:

Gesicht:

Augen:

Nase:

Mund:

Ohren:

Zähne:

Haare:

Sprache:

Bei Kennzeichen:

Charakt.-Eigenschaften:

Sicherheit b. Einsatz:

Körperliche Verfassung:

Copy of 1.1.5.1 : 5285727  
in conformity with the ITS Archives, Bad Arolsen  
Extract from the prisoners lists of the KZ Buchenwald

he left. A prisoner took us down a long wide passage into a big hall that extended the full length of a barracks. On one side were double bunks over three levels covered with blankets. On the opposite side were tables and chairs. The man announced he was in charge and allocated the bunks. I got a bunk on the middle level of the left-hand side. The man left and there was no one around. We assumed everyone was still at work. Our first impression was positive. I ignored warnings from the others and went out to look around. Off the passage there were more dormitories, empty rooms, bathrooms and toilets. At the end was a closed door. I hesitated for a moment, then opened it. It looked like storage space. I walked in and closed the door behind me. A big trunk caught my eye. I lifted the lid and saw it was full of jackets. I picked one up that was much softer and warmer than mine, put it on and decided to keep it. I was naive and didn't consider the risks. I slowly opened the door and cautiously stuck out my head. There was still no one around. I was walking towards our room when a door opened and the man stepped out. We were equally surprised, but luckily he was in a hurry and rushed past without a glance. I was relieved to return to our room and tell the boys about my discovery. I was not sure if the man noticed the jacket so I put it under my mattress.

We heard some noise outside and men began coming in. They were older than us and spoke a variety of languages: Polish, Yiddish, German and an unusual sounding one, Hungarian. It was the first time we met Hungarian Jews. Many of them spoke German and Yiddish too and it was good to be able to converse with everyone in the room. The man who shared my bunk introduced himself as Leon. He told me he had been there for a while. He said the German kapos were not so bad, but to be careful of the SS man, the nasty *Stallmaster* (Stable master). Our chat was interrupted by the arrival of soup. We were also given a dish and spoon. The soup was tasty, but as usual it left us still hungry. The dish was neither a plate nor a pot. It had two handles, was made of enamel

## THE CAMPS

and was deep enough for one helping of soup. It also served as a coffee cup. I asked my new neighbour for more details about the place, but he said I'd find out for myself. All he told me was lights out at 9 pm, we had to get up at 5 am and there were no pyjamas. You wore whatever you wanted and rolled up the remainder behind your pillow for quick dressing in the morning. I wondered what tomorrow would bring. The blanket was very thin, it was September and the weather was getting cooler. Leon lay on his bunk and started telling me his story. He had a wife and an eight-year-old daughter, parents, brothers and sisters. They lived in a small town with a large Jewish population and were all deported. Leon didn't know what happened to his family, but every night he dreamed about his wife and little girl. I didn't tell him my story, imagining it wouldn't make him feel any better.

We were woken from a deep sleep by the morning bell. Our supervisor rushed in, calling, *Aufstehen, schnell* (Get up quickly). The older men got dressed and left, but we were told to wait. We were starving and consumed the bread and coffee quickly. Then our supervisor showed us *betten bau* (how to make a bed), the first thing we had to do every morning after dressing. The blanket had to be folded in a certain way and angled to be put away inside the bunk. He said he was leaving and would expect all the bunks to be made properly when he returned. We started working frantically. I tried to copy Leon's technique and was worried the supervisor would stick his hand inside my bunk and find the jacket from the trunk. Luckily we passed inspection.

Later a fat kapo with a green triangle on his suit came to tell us we'd be working in the horse stables. They came into view as soon as we walked out to the yard. Ten of us were ordered into each of the three stables; I was assigned to the second. It was full of empty cubicles as the horses were working in the fields. The Pole in charge of the stable was waiting inside to allocate two horses to each of us. Their names were on the top of each cubicle. Mine

were called Larissa and Nordenay. The manager told us the horses would be brought back to their cubicle in the afternoon by their *kutschers* (their riders who worked with them in the fields), who would also hang up the animals' collars, straps and buckles etc.

As soon as the *kutschers* left, our job began. We had to fill the troughs at the end of our cubicles with feed and the buckets with water. The horses' black leather gear had to be cleaned with a tar-like cream which was kept in containers with rags near the cubicles. We were also shown how to clean the horses with a shallow box brush with handles. The brush collected dirt from the horses' coats which then had to be emptied into long lines along the concrete floor in front of the cubicle. When the process was finished, then the horse was clean. I was very worried about remembering all the instructions, but the little voice inside me said, 'You will!'

We were tired and hungry, but there were more instructions. After the horses left in the morning we had to push a wagon backwards into the stable (normally done by a horse), load the dirty straw from the cubicles with a pitchfork, push the wagon back out and restock the cubicles with fresh straw. The stable manager took us to the barn with feed and straw and told us to make sure the troughs were never empty. We returned to the stable and asked him when we'd get food. 'After all the work is done and we return to the barracks,' he said.

We felt like crying. It was early in the afternoon and the horses wouldn't be back for a while. In the meantime, there were other jobs to do in the yard. Some of us had to cut and chop piles of wood. Others had to sweep the yard in pedantic fashion so it was spotlessly clean. The SS man looked at us as he passed and moved on. By the time we finished the whole yard we were exhausted, but the job was not yet complete. We had to collect the accumulated dirt from the farthest edge and put it in a rubbish container. Luckily our supervisor was happy. 'The three of you will be the yard sweeping team,' he said. F.....g Germans, you even have a

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system for cleaning a yard, I thought to myself.

From a distance we could see the horses returning. I went into the stables and waited in front of my cubicles. The *kutschers* held the reins while they guided each pair to their place, removed and hung up the gear and pushed the horses inside. The Hungarian *kutscher* who stopped in front of my cubicles could only speak his own language, but I gathered they were my horses. He pushed them inside and left. They put their heads in the troughs and started to eat. All the instructions left my head and I didn't know where to start. The stable manager came over quickly. 'What are you waiting for? Get under, grab some straw in each hand and start cleaning their legs up and down. I'll be back shortly and show you how to do the rest. Better hurry. If the stable chief walks in and the work is not done, he carries a whip and he'll bash you up.'

Fear is a great driver. I kneeled and cleaned the horses' legs in a flash. It helped that they were very smooth. I got up just as he returned. 'Good job. See the pole between the two cubicles? Climb to the top and lean over to brush each horse from neck to tail a few times. When the brush is full, come down and knock the dirt out,' he said. He stayed to watch my first two attempts and said they weren't bad for a first effort.

The final job for the day was cleaning the horses' gear. We grabbed a rag to clean the collar and then all the leather straps. We dipped another rag into black polish and applied it evenly until everything was shiny. We marched to our barracks, stopping at a washroom with cold water, but there was no soap or towels.

Finally, we were back in our room where the others were already seated. I was so tired I lay on my bunk. Then I heard, 'The soup is here!' I grabbed my dish and spoon from behind my pillow and joined the queue. Over soup we discussed our horses. One of the boys complained he got two big draught horses which had a lot of hair on their legs, especially near the hoofs which were full of mud and hard to clean. He was almost in tears. Others said their

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horses were restless and hard to manage. I thought myself lucky because my horses appeared to be good. One of the boys noted we were the youngest there and should try to stick together and help each other. We all agreed. The boys from the first stable said their chief's room was in front of the stable and he could look in at any time. Leon asked how my day went. 'Bloody awful,' I said. 'You must be tough or you won't last long,' he urged. In an effort to cheer me up, he added, 'The war won't last much longer; they're losing everywhere.' I didn't respond, but lay down on my bunk and fell asleep almost immediately.

The bell woke me up again the next morning. The stable chief didn't like how I'd made my bunk and ordered me to do it again. I nearly missed out on my bread and 'coffee'. Outside, the 'fat' kapo ordered us to follow him past the stables to a back section of the yard filled with horse-driven carriages. He told us to pick three wagon-type carriages (with flat floors and low sides) and pull them towards each stable. Even with 10 of us, it was hard. Then we had to turn each one around and push them inside backwards.

We repeated the previous day's tasks: loading the dirty straw with a pitchfork from the cubicles onto the wagon, pushing the wagon out of the stable, filling the troughs with feed, spreading clean straw evenly over the cubicle floors and then sweeping the yard. We finished early so helped the others chop wood. This part of the yard was near the border wire. On the other side was an open field. You could see women pulling carriages similar to those of the ghetto, emptying human waste. Women kapos were screaming and using their whips. I thought of Mama and Jadzia doing similar work and became terribly upset. One of the boys pulled me away and said, 'Don't look over there; we all have mothers.'

The 'fat' kapo ordered us back to the stables as the horses were returning. I got to my cubicle just as they arrived. They were wet and had to be dried while they ate. I did everything as instructed and created more dirt stripes on the floor than previously. I had



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just finished polishing the gear when the stable chief approached, whip in his hand. He checked the horses, the dirt stripes, the gear and the leather straps, gave me a quick glance and walked away. My heart was pounding, but I knew he hadn't touched me because I did my job correctly. (I learnt a valuable lesson for the rest of my life; that whatever you do, do it right.) But he may not have been so happy on the way out because I heard some screams. Suddenly we heard, *Zum appell, alle austreten!* (Roll call, everyone out!). We didn't understand what it meant, but we lined up with everyone else. A kapo called, *Achtung!* (Attention!) and a few SS men (including the stable chief) approached. They looked everyone over, did a count and dismissed us. Finally, we were back in the barracks with our tongues hanging out for soup. Leon said the roll call had been easy; sometimes they forced you to stand for a long time, or punished someone publicly as a deterrent. Roll-call was a big worry for everyone.

All the boys became friendly with each other. I remember the names of three from our group of 30, all from Lodz. Kaczmarek, who came from Bratislava, spoke very good German and was promoted to clean the SS barracks, which were adjacent to ours. Factor had family in America and Podlaski had a father in Manchester, England. We also socialised with some Hungarians, who spoke Yiddish or German. I became quite friendly with a Hungarian man, Laci, who said the Germans had destroyed the Jewish population in a few short months with the willing help of the locals. I asked him about the men who could speak only Hungarian and he said they were farmers. I thought that could be why they were so good at handling horses.

I was getting used to our daily routine. One day it was raining when we got to the stables and the horses and *kutschers* were still there. There was no kapo around. Some of the men were swaying backwards and forwards as if praying. Laci said it was Yom Kippur. Many knew the prayers by heart. In normal times observant people



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fasted from dawn to dusk; here we got bread at dawn and soup at dusk – perfect Yom Kippur timing. But here we did it every day, not once a year, so each month equated to 30 years of fasting. I thought as I was doing all my fasting now, I wouldn't have to do it ever again – if I survived.

The 'fat' kapo walked in and yelled, 'Everybody out! The rain has stopped.' After the horses left, it was my turn on top of the wagon to straighten the straw. It was hard work not stepping in horse shit. There was no yard sweeping because it was wet.

After finishing in the stable, we were ordered to the wood pile where some Belgian Jews were already working. They were housed opposite us and we didn't have much contact. They spoke French and were mostly middle-aged men. A different kapo was dissatisfied with their work. He picked on one of them in particular, a man in his forties who had probably not done any physical work in his life and looked tired and miserable. After a while the Belgian went to the toilet. The kapo was busy with others, but eventually noticed his long absence and sent one of the boys to check on him. After a few minutes the boy came back screaming, 'He hung himself! He's hanging there!' The kapo ran over, had a look and said, 'Good, there'll be one more soup tonight.'

We were all shaken. The man's Belgian friends cut him down and the body was taken away. The kapo's callous reaction made me realise a prisoner's life had no value here. The roll call took longer, maybe because they had to adjust the numbers. After soup we discussed what happened and the boy who discovered the body said he'd never forget the dead man's face.

A kapo ordered us into the bathroom which had a big tub and told us to have a bath, two at a time. 'You first,' he said to Podlaski and another boy. 'Undress and I'll see you in the bathroom in five minutes.' We all knew we stank from the stables, but we were scared. We'd heard stories about homosexuals and didn't want to be victims. The first two boys said they had a good bath, but there was no soap.

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Another boy and I went next and ran naked down the passage. The kapo was waiting and told us to get inside the tub, which was quite deep. It was hot and felt good. I thought it was probably the same water used by the boys before us and wondered how it would look after 15 uses. But there was a big pot bubbling on the stove, so maybe the water would be changed. After a few minutes, he told us to get out, gave us some rags for drying and told us to send in the next boys. We ran back quickly. I felt a little cleaner, but we had to put on the same clothes. I rested on my bunk and thought about the bath, my first since leaving our flat in early 1940 for the ghetto. It was nearly the end of 1944, nearly five years later.

My body had deteriorated badly. I was skin and bone; you could count every rib and my legs were like a couple of sticks. My arms were thin too, but were muscled from hard work. My mind was working perfectly, with a steely resolve to survive, but it had to be matched by a strong body. I decided to speak to all my internal organs. First my heart: 'Will you support me and keep on beating without causing upheavals? Legs, will you continue carrying me?' 'Yes', they all answered. Now to my stomach, my most troublesome organ. 'Will you work with all of us and stop complaining so much? I'll try,' it replied, 'but you give me so little food and I'm the engine that keeps us going.' I had no answer to that and woke up in a sweat. It was all a dream.

Unfortunately, my stomach problems were very real and there was nothing I could do. I remember one particular episode of which I'm not proud. We got back early this day and I was one of the first to get soup. It was hot and thick and I didn't feel like talking to anyone so I ate it on my bunk. As more people came in my stomach whispered, 'Join the end of the queue for more soup, he won't recognise you.' The little voice inside me – to which I normally listened – warned me not to do it, but this time my stomach's voice was much stronger. I wiped my dish so it looked unused and rejoined the queue. The same man dished out the soup

every day. I held the dish in front of me as usual, but he looked at me and yelled, 'You swine, you got your soup before' and hit me on the head with the ladle.

Blood and soup ran down my face as I scrambled to my bunk in tears. Luckily Leon was there. He grabbed my hand, dragged me down the passage to the wash room and helped me wash the soup off my face. There were only scratches and not much blood and no one saw me. I snuck back to my bunk too ashamed to show my face, but then I had a second thought. Rather than feel embarrassed, I got off the bunk and joined some of the boys at the table and tried to explain my action. 'It was a stupid spur-of-the-moment decision and I shouldn't have done it,' I told them. Many of the boys said they'd often thought of doing the same thing, but were too scared. I was even congratulated for having the guts to do it. One boy said if I'd been successful he would have tried it next. The discussion eased my guilt and I returned to my bunk. I thanked Leon for his help and he warned me I was lucky to get off so lightly. He said I was fortunate there was no kapo there as their favourite punishment was 25 lashes with a leather strap on your bare bottom. As for the man with the soup, he brought it from the main camp's kitchen and could probably do what he wanted with the left-overs, so Leon said he wouldn't report me. This news cheered me up, but Leon warned my luck could run out if I did anything stupid again. The next day when I came for my soup the kitchen hand behaved as if nothing happened. I breathed a sigh of relief and was very grateful to Leon for adopting the role of my 'protector'.

Our routine changed over the next few days. After finishing the stable, we were ordered to collect our pitchforks and climb onto the wagons which were pulled towards a location with *compost haufen* (fertiliser mounds). We had to transfer the straw using our pitchforks. The 'skinny' kapo was in charge. We heard some screaming and swearing as women dragged carriages of human waste. The female kapos were whipping them cruelly. The carriage

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that stopped next to ours was wheeled in by four middle-aged women. They wore dirty skirts and wooden clogs. Some boys from our wagon were ordered to get buckets that were then filled with smelly liquid. We had to lift each bucket and pour the contents evenly over the straw. A new kapo climbed to the top to watch us working and kicked one of boys in the bum because he was not emptying his bucket quickly enough. The kapo jumped down when a car carrying an SS officer approached. The women's carriages had gone. He was obviously unhappy with the progress, because he called out loudly, 'You criminals, you must work faster, or you'll be punished!' Luckily the 'fat' kapo arrived, spoke to the SS officer and told us to get down to return to the stables, as the horses were coming back.

Suddenly the stables seemed like paradise. My horses weren't back yet, but I'd done all my preparation in the morning so I had some free time to rest. I got to love those two horses. They were easy to clean and well behaved. I was very tired and fell asleep. The horses woke me up as they entered the stables and were soon eating happily. After roll call we returned to the barracks earlier than usual and washed ourselves as best we could. We hated the new job and hoped we wouldn't have to do it again, but no such luck, we were taken back the next day. The fertiliser mound was higher and some of the Belgian Jews were working on it. The nasty kapo was in charge and I did my best to avoid his attention. The same SS officer arrived and as the kapo went down to greet him, I managed to have a good look. He was young with a round baby face and I realised that here he held the power of life and death. The skinny kapo joined them and they continued walking, inspecting all the mounds. We heard screams as they meted out punishment. They stopped again in front of us and I did my best to be inconspicuous. A middle-aged Belgian worker attracted the attention of the SS officer for not working quickly enough. The 'nasty' kapo climbed up the mound, yelled at the poor fellow and





*Historic Shavuot service at Buchenwald, 1945*

poured a bucket of human waste all over him. The man began shaking and collapsed. We pretended to ignore it and continued working. I don't know whether the kapo was trying to impress the SS officer, but he relaxed after the German left. They removed the unconscious man who was unlikely to recover as it was very cold and he was saturated. We were in a situation where everybody worried about himself becoming the next victim. The 'fat' kapo arrived to take us back to the stables. He was a welcome sight. He wasn't a bad fellow and I never saw him hit anyone.

Back at the barracks we were so dirty and smelly the 'bathroom' kapo told us to have a bath, which was most welcome. The surprises continued inside the bathroom when he gave us 'new' second-hand clothes. I got a warm jumper and pants, but the best thing was the pair of knee-high boots with wooden soles. We didn't get socks, but I grabbed some rags to wrap around my poor feet that were usually wet and cold. After all that, the soup tasted even better. That night I dreamt I was sitting at a table with a bowl of soup big enough to wash in. I had a spoon in one hand and a big slice of bread in the other. My face was all smiles as I shoved spoon after spoon of soup into my mouth. I woke up before discovering if I was able to finish the whole bowl.

One day after finishing work in the stables, I noticed the 'fat' kapo was nowhere to be seen. I went to collect feed from the barn when I heard some noise and turned around to see him coming down from the top of the straw pile, pulling up his pants. He was with a young woman who was straightening her skirt. He asked me to check if the coast was clear because I think he was afraid of the stable chief. I checked outside, gave him the all-clear and they quickly slipped out. The woman ran in a different direction. I think she may have been Russian; I heard there was a barracks full of them. He returned with the good news that we weren't going to the *compost haufen*. I was ordered back to clean the yard and others were sent to the woodpile, which was getting smaller. I noticed the

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big chimneys – clearly visible from the yard – weren't pushing out as much black smoke as before. I asked Leon about the smoke. He said it was from burned corpses. I asked how they were killed and he answered evasively, saying the Germans used many methods.

We could also see the dog squad, which was managed by SS men. All the dogs were German Shepherds and specially trained to attack people, which often occurred when they came off the trains. The stable chief and another SS man came out of the *schreibstube* (camp office) which was located opposite the entrance to our barracks, so we quickly turned around and continued sweeping.

It was November and getting really cold. I wore a sort of beret in the same fabric as the striped suit. It didn't cover my ears, which were freezing. We stomped our feet at the woodpile to keep them warm and swung each arm towards the other to heat our hands. This arm exercise was very popular with the carriage drivers.

I was sweeping the yard near the office when a spectacled man in civilian clothes came out, gave me a big slice of bread, turned around and went back in. I was stunned and didn't know what to make of it. I shared the bread with the other two boys and we ate as we swept. Leon said the man was a nice German civilian who worked in the *schreibstube*, a homosexual who was generous with bread. Usually he didn't expect anything in return, but he had a special section in front of the barracks to himself. Leon's words upset me. What if the man expected something from me? I decided however terrible my situation, I would never sell my bum for a piece of bread. Anyway, I worried for nothing as he never came near me again. I realised that giving us bread was the deed of a good man and he was probably the only one here.

On Sundays we enjoyed some free time as the horses didn't go to the fields. I spoke to a Hungarian man sitting next to a box of tools. He told me in German he was an electrician and handyman who did all the repairs. I told him I was also an electrician and asked him to remember me if he needed a helper. He was non-



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committal. I met a group of German Jews and one of them gave us some dog biscuits, which were hard, but tasted okay. The advantage was that you had to chew them for a long time before swallowing and they were good for my stomach. When we asked for more the man demanded bread in exchange. I don't know what the others did, but I said 'no'.

The next morning after stable work we were ordered to get saws, axes, hammers and empty bags from the woodpile and load them onto an empty wagon to which a *kutscher* hitched his two horses. The kapo who supervised the woodpile work got on with us. An unexpected passenger was an SS man with a gun. We were worried. Maybe he had an order to shoot us? There was nothing we could do, so we just sat there quietly. The wagon travelled a long way across an empty field until we heard the sound of flowing water and were surrounded by trees, which the kapo ordered us to start cutting down. The SS man went for a walk and returned asking who could speak Polish. Some of us lifted our hands and he chose me to follow him. My heart was pounding. Was he going to shoot me? I needn't have worried. Ahead of us was a typical Polish village house with a thatched roof. Behind it was flowing water, probably the Vistula River.

The SS man said, *Komm, wir gehen herein* (Come, we're going inside). He knocked on the door, gun in hand. An old woman opened the door and yelled in Polish, *Jezus Chrystus*. She was terrified. An old man appeared behind her and we entered. The German told me to tell them not to be afraid, nothing was going to happen, '*Nie bujcie sie, nic wam sie nie stanie*,' I said. The woman said they had permission to live here and the house was outside the camp area. I translated her explanation to the SS man who was only interested in whether they had any bread. *Troche* (A little), the woman answered. She opened a bottom drawer in a sideboard which contained a thick slice of bread. The SS man took the bread and put it in his pocket. 'Let's go,' he said and I added

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*dziękuję* (thank you). I saw they were very poor and that slice of bread might have been their dinner. When we returned, the others looked at us curiously, wondering where we'd been. Quite a lot of wood was cut by then. The German was middle-aged and didn't care about our work, leaving it to the kapo. He found a nice resting spot, ate the bread and fell asleep.

We were chopping and loading when one of the boys saw a man on horseback galloping towards us. He told the kapo who woke the SS man. The rider was a high-ranking officer with no left arm. Our SS man stood to attention and explained our work. The visitor called, *Weiter machen!* (Carry on!) and left. The wagon was nearly full and the *kutscher* was ordered to hitch the horses back. We all settled down on top of the wood and the horses strained because of the heavy load. We arrived back quite late and rushed to the stables because the horses were already inside. The wagon of wood was left outside for emptying the next day. I told the boys what happened in the house and we wondered if the SS man got enough to eat. Kaczmarek, who worked in their barracks, said the SS received portioned food which may be insufficient. But why were we worried? We knew if they were really hungry they'd take our food.

We didn't have a calendar, but based on the cold weather and Yom Kippur being the end of September, we guessed it was November.

One day we were all ordered outside where all the kapos and their German-criminal assistants carefully looked us over. Some were selected to board an awaiting wagon. They knew their fate and screamed they were good workers, but it didn't help. Us lucky ones returned to the barracks. We were all strangely quiet, probably wondering when our turn would come.

Realising that only work could save us, we tried harder to please the kapos. The stable chief inspected the stables at least twice a day and he seemed satisfied. However, one morning I did a stupid

thing. We were collecting the wagons as usual when I noticed one full of cabbages. I was very hungry and without thinking I grabbed a cabbage and clumsily tried to hide it inside my jacket, but wasn't quick enough to evade the 'fat' kapo who ordered me to follow him. Back at the stable he got somebody else to clean my cubicles and told me to sit down with the cabbage. I started crying because I knew the stable chief could walk in any time and I'd heard about his cruelty. The little voice inside me screamed, 'You idiot, what have you done?' I had committed theft and could hang! I was panicked, but then a miracle occurred. The fat kapo saw the stable chief approaching and told me to take the cabbage and hide it in my cubicle. By the time he reached the stable, I'd hidden the cabbage with straw and was back working. I thought perhaps the 'fat' kapo was rewarding me for helping him leave the barn, but the reason wasn't important. It just proved you could meet a decent human being in the most unlikely place. I munched the cabbage leaves like a rabbit, but it didn't ease my hunger and I put the remainder in the troughs for my two horses. I couldn't look at another cabbage for years.

Some of the boys had witnessed my stupidity. One said it was dangerous because I was out in the open and the 'fat' kapo was close by. Another said I was very lucky because he was a good man. I admitted it was another silly spur-of-the-moment action that fortunately turned out all right. Lying on my bunk that night I wondered why I took risks others didn't. I blamed my stomach as it had promised to behave, yet forced me to pinch a cabbage it didn't even enjoy. The little voice inside me warned, 'Sometimes people can be lucky three times. You've been lucky twice. Don't tempt fate.'

The next morning, I stayed away from the wagons with vegetables. Later I tried to thank the 'fat' kapo, but he told me to get back to work as if nothing happened.

The German prisoners were mainly middle-aged. I remember

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one called Zimmerman who snuck into our hall to talk to us, maybe because we were the youngest here. We were cautious about talking to him, but he put us at ease. He said he also received little food and was often hungry. One day he came to say goodbye because he had been drafted into the army. But a couple of days later he was back because the army wanted the horse called Zimmerman, not him. This made us all laugh, which was a rare thing.

Orders came through to demolish all buildings with chimneys, called crematories. The next morning, we loaded shovels, picks, sledgehammers and wheelbarrows onto a few wagons, assisted by the 'skinny' kapo and the 'nasty' kapo. Things weren't looking good and we were worried. When we arrived, the crematorium had been partly demolished by other prisoners. The walls were nearly gone, but a row of ovens with steel doors and a narrow railway line holding small-tipped wagons remained. We were ordered to break up the bricks and smash the concrete and plaster and load it on our wagons. It was back-breaking work. The SS men and kapos were yelling, '*Schnell*' ('Quick') and hitting people. I loaded the debris at the back of the wagon to avoid attention. Finally, all the wagons were full and turned around to go back. The horses struggled with the heavy loads and soggy ground. We had to walk behind them and push as needed. Half-way back we stopped, emptied the wagons and spread the debris evenly over the wet ground – more back-breaking work.

Back at camp we still had our evening work to do in the stables. I threw myself on my bunk and fell asleep immediately. Somebody woke me up for soup. I was the last one to get it and it was the best I'd ever had – right from the bottom of the pot and so thick the spoon was almost standing up. I was so tired and despondent that for the first time since the beginning of the war I had doubts I would survive. I shared my thoughts with Leon, who tried to cheer me up. 'Look, it's already December. They know they're losing the war and are trying to erase all traces of their crimes,' he said. 'It

won't be long. You must hang on!' 'Yes,' I said, 'but if I have to do the same work tomorrow, I'm sure I'll collapse and we know what happens to those who collapse.' The little voice inside me rang an alarm bell: 'You mustn't think like that! You are strong enough to get through it. Your mind must work with your body.'

The next day we waited anxiously for our work orders and were greatly relieved to hear we weren't going anywhere. The work in the stables was a picnic compared to our jobs at other locations. The 'fat' kapo was like a friend compared to the others we worked with. Again we cleaned the yards and saw a lot of activity around the *schreibstube* with SS men and other Germans coming and going and looking worried.

Nothing much changed over the next few days. One night after soup we heard the German prisoners singing *Heilige nacht, stille nacht* (Holy night, silent night). I had never heard this Christmas carol before, but it sounded nice. Zimmerman said they were preparing for Christmas celebrations in the next few days. We did only the necessary work in the stables and returned to the barracks for the promised lunch of potatoes.

We were sitting at the table when we heard an air-raid siren followed by explosions and we dived under the table. Looking across towards the open field we saw anti-aircraft batteries appearing from underground, firing furiously at the aircraft, which were not visible. A few minutes later there was a very loud explosion close to us and things started falling down. We stayed under the table holding our heads, terrified. It became quieter and a siren sounded the end of the raid. The 'skinny' kapo came in and yelled, 'Everybody out, there's a lot of work to be done.'

The bomb had created a deep crater in the middle of the yard and one of the stables was badly damaged. We could hear pitiful sounds from the injured horses. Our stable was unharmed and we tried to calm the horses as they were trying to escape. The *kutscher* and I patted Larissa and Nordenay gently to settle them down.

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Then we were sent to do other urgent tasks. A long ladder was already in place against the barn wall and I was ordered to climb up to help repair the roof which was badly damaged. The only ladder I had ever climbed was in the ghetto. This one was very high and wobbly and I was scared of falling. Once I reached the top I had to move onto the roof. One false step would result in a three-storey fall to certain death. There were others already on the roof, including the 'nasty' kapo and they looked scared too. We had to remove the broken tiles and throw them down to the ground. The roof was steeply angled and it would be easy to slip. Unexpectedly the 'skinny' kapo called for the electrician – me – to come down. Cautiously I eased myself towards the ladder and descended step by step. When I finally reached the ground, I was nearly ready to kiss it. Miki, the Hungarian electrician had told him about me and said he needed help to restore the electricity quickly. It was good luck for me.

I carried Miki's heavy tool box and the stepladder. First we had to fix the overhead wires and then attend to a lot of temporary repairs inside the barracks and stables. We did some urgent work late in the day and when I got back most of the boys were asleep and a bowl of cold soup was on my bunk. Leon was still awake and said he'd heard parts of the main camp had been evacuated. I don't know where he obtained any of his information, but it was usually accurate. Leon had worked in the cow shed with some of the Germans, including Zimmerman, who thought the Soviet army was not far away. I thought maybe we'd be liberated soon, but remembered back to when the Russians were close to the ghetto and nothing happened. I expressed my doubts to Leon and went to sleep.

I didn't go to the stable for the next few days as I was still working with Miki. Then one morning all repairs stopped and we were ordered to prepare to leave the camp immediately.

The room was a hive of activity. I put on all my spare clothes

and wrapped more rags around my feet, but I didn't have a coat. I kept some rags to wrap around my face. It was early January and icy cold. There were 30 boys when we arrived and the same 30 boys were now leaving. We promised to stick together as long as possible. I thanked Leon for everything. He said that the Germans were trying to escape from the approaching Soviet army and unfortunately were taking us with them. He said it would be good for us to run away or hide, but would be very risky. I also said goodbye to Laci and Miki.

*Alle austreten* (Everybody out), a German ordered. We were given some bread, formed into a column, surrounded by armed SS men and then walked out through the gate of Wirtschaftshof Birkenau. I cast a last look at the place where I'd spent the last four months. It was bad, but it could have been worse. I wondered what would happen to Larissa and Nordenay.

We kept marching. It was getting dark and snow began to fall. Wagons followed with provisions, probably for the SS men. We would normally get soup around this time, but there was no hope of that now. We clung to each other for support and warmth. A kapo said we'd spend the night in a school building in the next town, but when we arrived the place was already occupied so we had to keep marching. Anyone who collapsed was shot. We helped each other to stay upright. We were spurred on by what sounded like thunder, followed by crackling fire. It was probably Soviet artillery and it sounded pretty close.

Finally, we stopped in front of another town and marched inside. We brushed off snow from our clothes and lay down on the ground exhausted. There was no food. We cuddled up for warmth and fell into uneasy sleep. The little voice inside me warned, 'Now is a matter of life and death. You lasted this long, so now near the end you must be strong'. All my organs seemed to agree and even my stomach was silent.

The Germans were in a hurry and woke us up early in the

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morning. They gave us each a slice of bread. Luckily it wasn't snowing. We didn't know where we were or where we were heading. We came to a road in the centre of a town. The residents looked on with pity and tried to give us some food, but they were pushed away by the SS guards. The townspeople spoke Czech so we assumed we were in Czechoslovakia, marching towards Germany. We stopped at another village late in the afternoon as it was getting dark. A few of us were told to get inside a barn full of straw to settle for the night. It was very dark. I lay down and covered myself with straw which kept me warm. Somebody asked if we'd get food. No one answered. One of the boys said the Germans didn't count us so he was going to hide under some straw. He was warned not to do it because he'd be shot on the spot if they found him. I didn't sleep too badly.

We were woken by the orders of an SS man, *Raus, schnell* (Out quickly). He counted us as we walked out the door. There was one person short. He walked in as a boy was coming out. He was lucky for only getting a kick in the bum. I wondered if it was the boy who talked about hiding. We had nothing to eat.

We left the village and marched into open fields. The SS guards ordered us to move faster and they shot anyone who struggled. They were moving backwards and forwards, looking everyone over with their guns ready. One stared at me, but he moved on. There were more screams and bodies lay everywhere. We approached another town and they stopped shooting.

We were taken to a railway station where a train with open wagons was waiting on the tracks. We were divided into groups. It was a tight squeeze and I found myself among strangers. The only boys with me from our group were Podlaski and Laci. We heard a whistle and the train started moving. Sitting so close to each other kept us a little warmer. SS guards were positioned between some of the wagons. It was getting dark and it started to snow. There was no place to shelter. We thought some people must be jumping



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off the wagons because we heard a lot of shooting. I wondered if it was a better option to dying here, but the little voice inside me screamed, 'Stay here. If you're lucky and don't get shot, jumping could break your legs and you won't be able to run anywhere.' I listened and stayed seated, but there was no escape from the falling snow. Many men were standing, but they lost their balance and fell over from the train's movement. Suddenly there were men on top of me and I felt like I was suffocating. There were screams, hands and legs everywhere. I yelled, 'Help, get off me, I don't want to die!' Somehow I managed to get up and I hung on to the side of the wagon, too frightened to sit down again. We heard another whistle as the train passed villages and towns. It was getting lighter and the worst night of my whole life was nearly over. I looked around shocked. There were dead bodies everywhere. My big, strong Hungarian friend Laci was among them. I had never seen a dead body before at such close quarters. My first reaction? Not to become the next one. Luckily Podlaski was okay and we hugged.

The train stopped outside a place that looked like a camp. Men in civilian clothing approached the train and we begged them for bread. They wanted tobacco, so none of us got anything. The SS guards pushed them away. A guard ordered us to stack the dead bodies in the back of the wagon. It was a terrible job. We grabbed the bodies by the hands and legs and dragged them to the back. I tried not to look at their distorted faces. There was more space for the rest of us now and we sat down as the train started moving.

The weather had improved and we hoped we'd arrive at our next destination soon or there would be many more corpses. We'd not eaten for days, but the little voice inside reassured me, 'You will make it; you must make it!' The remainder of the day and night were better because we had more room and it wasn't snowing. But there were still new corpses in the morning. Some people had fallen asleep and never woke up.

The train stopped and I saw a sign that said Weimar Station.

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It restarted and continued for a short while until we arrived at a station called Buchenwald. Some of us managed to stand, but it was difficult. The guards went to meet the approaching SS men and prisoners in striped suits. We were ordered out of the wagons and helped down by the prisoners. With my last bit of energy I straightened up to avoid the SS men's attention as we walked to the gate of Buchenwald concentration camp. They counted us before we entered a huge square in front of many barracks. We marched to a building, were told to enter and undress. The boots on my feet were hard to remove because my legs were so swollen. Someone helped me and it was very painful. There were showers in the next room. We were paralysed with fear, expecting gas to come out, but it was water – very cold, but we didn't mind. Dripping wet we were ordered to queue up in front of a man who dipped a big brush in a bucket of disinfectant and scrubbed our private parts and under our arms. It stung terribly and we cried and crouched in pain. They gave us striped suits and shoes, but no underwear or socks.

We were directed into an office where a prisoner seated at a table asked my name, date of birth, last address and assigned me a number: 119935. This was how I'd be known in Buchenwald. We marched to another building. What a terrible sight. The wooden bunks were full of emaciated men, though we didn't look any different. I was told to take an empty middle bunk. There were eight of us, all strangers of roughly the same age. Lying on bare planks was very uncomfortable for our skinny bones. Finally, we got some soup, our first bit of food in days.

*Zum appell, alle austreten!* (Roll call, everybody out!) We joined the others shuffling towards the door. The *block aelteste* (prisoner in charge of the block) yelled, *Schnell, schnell* (Quickly, quickly). Outside we lined up in equal rows. It was very cold and people were moving around to keep warm. We were still, as a group of SS men approached. They walked around us slowly. I was in the second row behind a tall man, trying to stand straight and look fit.

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They pulled a few men out of the lines and ordered the remainder to return inside. Back on our bunks we rubbed our frozen hands and feet and started getting to know each other. There were boys from our original group who I last saw in Auschwitz as well as others from different camps.

I woke up the next morning stiff, cold and sore. There were no windows, but the lights were on and other people were moving, so we thought it must be morning. A man from the bunk below said something in Hungarian, which none of us understood, and then asked in Yiddish where we came from. He'd been in Buchenwald for a while and explained the routine. We would soon get a loaf of bread to share and then a man from the office would come and call out numbers. 'When you hear your number you must immediately go to the front. If you don't, the *block aelteste* will come and bash you up and you'll be sent to another camp. Let's hope our numbers don't come up because here we don't work and where they're going they have to work,' he said.

We got a loaf of bread of about 30 centimetres long to be divided into eight portions. But how would we cut it without a knife? Break it up by hand? But that wouldn't work because it was soft and the pieces would be uneven. Then one of the boys, Moshe, suggested using the string that laced his shoes. As the size of each slice would be different, we claimed each one without looking. Some received bigger slices, but we didn't complain as the system was fair.

In the afternoon of our second day, I needed to go to the toilet and my new Hungarian friend offered to accompany me. Moshe joined us. The toilet block was nearby and there were many men inside. It contained round concrete containers around three metres in diameter, half a metre high and 10 centimetres wide. We found a free place and sat down. There was no privacy and plenty of bare bottoms. A man next to me was holding a page of a newspaper and I asked for a piece, which he gave me. It was the size of a postage

## THE CAMPS

stamp. I thanked him and then we entered the next room to wash. There were round fountains that spouted water when you pressed a metal ring with your foot. There was only cold water and you had to dry yourself with your hands. Our bunk was near the end of the block and skinny faces with big eyes looked down on us as we walked past. Many people asked us questions. Some were walking around. There was a lot of noise and I was glad to settle back in my bunk. Our group started talking about movies to pass the time. We all loved the cowboy and Indian pictures with Tom Mix and his horse and discussed them in detail.

Things were getting worse as the number of dead bodies mounted daily. One morning the stench was so bad they sprinkled chlorine around the block. The fumes caused everyone to sneeze and cough. Tears were running down my face, I was choking and thought this was the end of me. But apparently they didn't intend to kill us just yet because they opened the door to let in fresh air. We went outside and took deep breaths.

I was worried and upset because the little voice inside me had gone silent. Until now it was providing encouragement, assuring me I'd make it, but now nothing. Had it given up hope that I would survive? If I ever imagined hell, this was it. The only thing missing was fire. It was said no one ever escaped from hell. I was resigned to my fate. I closed my eyes to sleep, not expecting to wake up.

'Wake up! Wake up!' somebody yelled in my ear and shook me. It was Moshe calling me for roll call. Somehow I managed to gather enough strength to get up. Luckily they dismissed us quickly and the soup arrived soon after, which cheered me up. I thanked Moshe for waking me up. So far nobody from our bunk was missing; we promised to look out for each other. A man stuck his head into our bunk with a pair of scissors which he said we could use in exchange for a piece of bread. My nails hadn't been cut since I was in the ghetto. I said I wanted to first make sure the scissors worked and he reluctantly handed them over. I cut my fingernails and then

my toenails, which was more difficult and painful because some of them were ingrown. I handed the scissors to the others. 'Where's the bread?' the man demanded. 'We'll give it to you when we finish,' we answered, knowing none of us had any bread. He wasn't happy. As I was the first one to use his scissors, he approached me and I told him to come back in the morning for bread when we got our ration. He cursed, grabbed his scissors and disappeared. To make life even more difficult, the Germans stopped delivering whole loaves and we had to go outside to collect our ration, as with soup. We went in a group because some people were so desperate they would try and grab the bread from your hand.

The death toll continued to grow. People just didn't wake up in the morning. If anyone in our bunk noticed one of the others falling into a deep sleep, they would rouse him to make sure he was all right. I was angry when my sleep was interrupted, but who knows, maybe it would have been my last sleep. Deep down however, we knew the day would come when not waking up was a blessing that would end our suffering.

Then something unexpected happened. A man called Gustav came and told us he was the *block aelteste* at *Kinder* (children) Block 66 where the conditions were much better. I was among those he chose to take there. We left our 'hell block' with a sigh of relief and followed Gustav to an area known as the 'small camp'. Block 66 was near the boundary wire and a watchtower. Our first impression was good. There were tables, benches and even windows. We were allocated a bunk, but most of the boys were talking around the tables. Although it was called a *kinder* block, there were few children; most were aged 15 to 20. I recognised some more boys from our Auschwitz group including Szaja and Abram. The best news was that we didn't have to go outside for roll call and bread and soup were distributed inside. There was an air of optimism and the days seemed to pass faster.

One day Gustav said he was organising a revue performance

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and asked who could sing. I think there were some volunteers. On performance day Gustav arrived with some guests who helped him to protect our block. I remember two Yiddish songs. The first one was about how we would bash up the Germans and the other was about playing football.

Even though we received the same food rations, I felt better. Sitting around a table talking to others was a positive experience. There were boys from different places and Yiddish was the common language. There were plenty of stories, some more terrible than others, but the common thread in all of them was concern about what happened to our families. We also discussed the current situation. There were whispers about Gustav being a communist and belonging to an underground organisation in the camp.

One morning my number was called out. Everyone was upset because we thought we were safe in this block, but Gustav said not to worry, we were going to Weimar to do some cleaning and would return in the afternoon. I had regained some strength and was able to walk to the station where there were cattle wagons waiting. The scene revived bad memories. I thought perhaps Gustav was lying; that again we would have to travel to some unknown destination, but he was telling the truth. Police and SS men met us at Weimar station, formed us into a column to march into town. It was a revelation. People were dressed in civilian clothes. Women with children pretended not to see us, but they were probably scared of the SS.

We went to a depot to pick up brooms and shovels, were divided into small groups and taken in different directions. I remember passing a house with a plaque that said the famous German writer Goethe lived there in the 19th century. We stopped at a little park and started to sweep its paths. Suddenly there must have been an air raid because we saw people running towards shelters, but we were ordered to take refuge under trees. Sitting down on the ground was welcome respite. After the raid we headed to the

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station for Buchenwald and got back just in time for soup. We were asked lots of questions. I said the park would be nice to visit as a free person, but not in our situation.

One day my left arm started hurting and I could see a small abscess on my armpit. I hoped it would disappear, but it filled with pus and got bigger. I screamed with pain whenever my arm was touched. Gustav told me to go to the *revir* (hospital) block and to mention his name. I walked slowly as I was frightened, not knowing what to expect. I could see miserable faces through the windows. Lots of people were waiting to be treated; some were moaning, others were crying. It was very depressing and felt hopeless and I thought this would be the end of me. But unexpectedly, the little voice inside me that had been silent for so long gave me hope, 'You will overcome; it won't be long now.'

Two men in white coats examined everyone. One of them took me to another room, grabbed a scalpel and pierced my abscess. The pus shot out in a stream. He squeezed it all out, trimmed the skin with a pair of scissors and applied a paper bandage which he wound across my neck. It hurt like hell. Then he told me to go back to my block quickly because he didn't want the German inspector to see my condition.

The boys who brought the soup said they had heard a rumour that the camp would be evacuated. It was the end of March. We knew the Germans were losing the war, but they always managed to keep killing. Five long years had passed, so maybe, just maybe, we would be liberated and war would end.

One day in early April we heard an announcement over the loud speaker, *Samtliche Juden austreten* (All Jews go out). Gustav said we must go before the SS men started shooting. We marched to the big square where Jews from other blocks were already assembled. Some, surrounded by guards, were marching towards the gate. We sat at the back talking and waiting our turn. We were scared and wanted to return to our block, but the guards and kapos were

## THE CAMPS

watching. Then another miracle: the sound of an air raid siren. We ran to our block and vowed they would have to drag us forcibly to go anywhere. The kitchen had closed so there was no soup or bread. Some boys pulled up floorboards in case they had to hide should the guards return, which they did. I remember running away in the opposite direction, but no one chased me. Maybe they thought they would catch me later.

After a while, I decided to return to our block. The doors and windows were locked so I banged on the glass, almost breaking it. Some boys dragged me in by the arms and I screamed in pain. We hadn't eaten for days. Someone managed to get some jam from the kitchen and we ate it from the jar and licked our fingers. We looked like skeletons with painted red faces. We talked excitedly about what was happening. Was there the slightest chance we could soon be free? 'Don't believe it,' some pessimists were saying. 'They'll kill us before that.' Not many of us slept that night.

The next morning it was strangely quiet. Then things started happening. We could see prisoners with guns running towards the fences. Someone yelled, 'The guards have left the watchtowers!' We heard that American tanks were approaching. At that moment we realised we were *free*! We were crying, laughing and jumping with joy. A bunch of skeletons jumping around and kissing each other – what a sight! It was Friday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1945. We would never forget that date. We would always consider it our second birthday.





*Liberated orphans march out of the main gate of Buchenwald.*

## AFTER LIBERATION

The days after liberation were eventful. The kitchen started to function, but the first soup it cooked was very thick and full of vegetables and meat, unsuitable for people who hadn't eaten for days. Many people began vomiting and got sick. The kitchen staff soon realised their mistake and made soup containing milk and cereal, which I ate.

One of the first Americans to arrive was a Yiddish-speaking army chaplain, Rabbi Herschel Schachter. As soon as he saw our condition he called for medics, one of whom re-treated and re-dressed my wound, which he said was okay. It felt better. We found storerooms full of clothing and changed our striped uniforms for civilian outfits. It felt strange wearing clothing that belonged to someone who was probably dead. We were told we would be transferred to the buildings outside the camp formerly occupied by SS guards.

Reporters and photographers were waiting at the gate eager to take pictures. Eight of us were allocated a nice ground-floor room with a bunk each. It was real luxury compared to our previous accommodation. I remember the names of some of the boys who shared that room: Szaja Chaskiel, Abram Kimelman, Izak Czalczynski and Artek Szajnbajn. On the walk back to the camp I looked up to the clock on top of the gate. It had stopped at 3.15pm. I think that became the official time of liberation.

Many Americans visited the camp and looked at the dead bodies in disbelief. One day they brought German civilian men and women from Weimar who were very distressed and insisted

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they didn't know what was happening. Former prisoners hurled abuse at them. To my surprise the Americans were accompanied by the police officer who guarded me at Weimar. They forced German men to drag dead bodies into a pit dug by a bulldozer.

Photographers and reporters were recording everything. I was next to some soldiers who were understandably shocked and I could understand a little of what they were saying. Using my limited knowledge of English and my hands, I struck up a conversation and they gave me some chocolate and cigarettes. Triumphant I brought the treats back to our room and we enjoyed eating chocolate for the first time in years. Some of the boys tried smoking, but I didn't like it.

I returned to the gate the next day to wait for the Americans, who arrived in trucks and jeeps, keen to see the camp for themselves. Other guides who were older and spoke English better took them around, while I stood shyly on the sidelines. After a while I was the only one left. A group of soldiers and officers asked if I could show them around. They wanted to know why I was in the camp. Did I do something wrong? It took me a while to understand what they meant. I said some of the prisoners may have broken the law, but I was here simply because I was a Jew. They knew Hitler was persecuting Jews, but some said they were unaware of the camps.

One of the first things I showed the Americans was a block similar to mine. It was dark and depressing, filled with empty bunks bearing witness to the horrors perpetrated here. They stood still; some took photos. Because of my limited English, I lay down on a bunk to demonstrate being frightened, hungry and cold on bare boards. They were speechless. Then I said, 'Let's get out of here.' I was more distressed than them, as it was the first time I'd been back to a block and my painful memories were still very fresh. Next I took them to the crematorium where I'd heard about bodies being burnt in ovens with steel doors. There was nothing to explain. The next room was the execution chamber where

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prisoners were hung on wall hooks to die slowly and painfully. We could see scratch marks on the walls from desperate prisoners whose hands had been tied behind their backs. I couldn't describe it properly so I demonstrated by standing against the wall. We left this terrible place in silence and walked back towards the gate.

We were all deeply affected by what we saw. One of the officers put his arm around me, asked some personal questions and wished me luck. Outside the gate, they gave me lots of cigarettes, chocolates and boxes of field rations. I did some more guiding, but had to stop because it was too upsetting. Tobacco was like currency. The food we were getting from the kitchen was pretty basic and cigarettes helped to get cheese, eggs and other items.

Despite everything, we fought and played pranks like typical teenagers, though most of the time we were seriously discussing what to do and where to go. Rabbi Schachter showed a keen interest in us and we attended some of his Jewish Holyday services in a former SS guards' hall.

One day a man walked in and asked if anyone wanted to return to Poland. We were so surprised we were dumbstruck. Then I remembered my promise to Tata and Heniek that we'd meet in Lodz after the war. I lifted my hand to say yes, as did another boy. The man (he must have been from the Polish government) said a truck would pick us up the next afternoon. I explained my reasons to the boys and there was much debate over my decision.

The next morning, I bundled up my few possessions and spent my last few hours with the boys. We all agreed we'd miss each other and said we hoped to meet again. The truck driver came to ask if we were ready. We all walked out together, hugging and kissing. The two of us got on top of the truck but when I looked down at their faces, the little voice inside me started to scream, 'Don't go, don't go back to that cursed place!' 'Wait,' I yelled to the driver as he was about enter the cabin, 'We're not going. Let us off.' I spoke for both of us because the other boy indicated he felt the same. We

dropped our bundles and jumped off the truck. The boys grabbed and hugged us. Without saying a word, the driver drove away. As soon as we got inside I explained my change of heart: 'There was something in their faces that said we weren't welcome in Poland. It was an instant realisation. If any members of my family have survived, we'll arrange to meet in a better place.'

We spoke to other prisoners who caught German guards and killed them without pity, even brutally. We were glad. I wondered if I could do the same. I decided I would have no trouble killing those who hurt me and my family, but I wasn't sure about the others.

Having run out of chocolate and cigarettes, I decided to return to the gate and offer my services as a guide to the Americans who continued to visit. But this time I was more prepared; stronger and better equipped to answer questions. The fact that I was repeatedly asked why I was in the camp suggested many people were unaware of the persecution of Jews. Another time I guided a group of English soldiers, who asked many questions and wanted to see everything, but they were far less generous than the Americans. They gave me very little apart from a thank you.

One day I was nearly shot by an American soldier when I saw some planes lined up in an area outside the camp and approached one for a closer look. Suddenly there was a guard holding a gun pointed in my direction yelling, 'Get away from there!' With my heart pounding, I called out 'sorry' and quickly walked away. It would have been ironic to survive everything, then to be shot by an American soldier.

I heard stories about people travelling to nearby towns and bringing back all kinds of goods, with Erfurt mentioned as a good place. After guiding some more Americans, I asked one of the officers if they drove through Erfurt. On the spur of the moment, I asked if they could give me a lift to get some clothes. He looked at the rags I was wearing and said to get into the back seat of his jeep. After an hour or so we arrived at Erfurt and stopped in front

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of a place guarded by a black soldier. The officer said he wasn't stationed there, but the guard would take me to another officer who would help me. I thanked him and he wished me luck.

The guard walked me through a passage into an office where two officers looked at me in surprise. The guard explained how I came to be here and he left. I told them I was a survivor of Buchenwald and one of them asked if I spoke Yiddish. The other officer was Jewish, but didn't speak Yiddish. I talked to them about life in the camps and why I'd come to Erfurt. One of them said they'd help me to get some clothing. The other walked out and came back, saying the company commander wanted to meet me. I think he was a captain. He was very nice and said he would get me to guide him when he visited Buchenwald. Then he said, 'Let's go and have some lunch.' The mess hall was full of soldiers. I was invited to sit at the officers' table. The soldiers were all black and looked at us curiously, probably because of my presence. The conversation was mostly about me. The officers said they hoped I would be able to find some of my family. The food was delicious and I thought with food like that in their stomachs they should be able to conquer the whole world. I thanked them for lunch and the Yiddish-speaking officer told me to go outside and socialise with the soldiers. Later he would organise some clothing and take me back to Buchenwald. I was soon surrounded by soldiers wanting to know why I was there. After telling them my story, I wanted to hear theirs. One of them, who was very well-spoken, told me about their company 978 which fought in many battles and saw some camps. They knew about the Jews.

Then I went further into the yard and saw some soldiers playing a game I'd never seen before. They called it 'baseball'. They asked me to throw a ball and run, but I couldn't do either. The well-spoken soldier became my companion and tried to explain what was going on there. I asked him why there were so many German women around the fences talking to the soldiers. He said they



*Wearing the uniform given to me by an American soldier*



*Young survivors leave Buchenwald by train.*



## MARCH INTO LIFE

were arranging to meet, but it was hard because of the language barrier. Naively I asked why they wanted to meet. He laughed and made an international gesture that meant f..k and said they could get as much sex as they wanted in exchange for chocolate and cigarettes. When I told him I spoke German he suggested I could help by translating. Two soldiers were using hand signals to communicate with two middle aged women. The soldiers told me to ask the women if they could meet; they had plenty of chocolates and cigarettes. I also translated the place and time for the rendezvous. It gave me great satisfaction to see members of the 'master race' prostituting themselves to members of the 'lower race'. I was helping some others when the Jewish officer said it was time to go. My companion gave me a photo from his pocket as a souvenir of my visit. I would keep it forever. We shook hands and he wished me luck.

We got back to the office and the other officer gave me a pair of army pants, a jacket and boots, which I put on immediately. They felt marvellous. My poor feet had not worn such comfortable shoes for a long time. It was an interesting drive back. There was no visible bombing damage and the streets were full of people, including, surprisingly, Germans in army uniforms. There were American soldiers with German women and other people who looked like former prisoners. It was a real mixed crowd.

Then we drove to a men's clothing warehouse and knocked on the door. The man who answered was clearly unhappy to see us. The officer told him in broken Yiddish and German to fit me out with some clothing. The German answered, '*Jawohl*' ('Yes'). I told him in German I wanted a suit, jumper, shirt, underwear and anything else that I might like. He winced and said to follow him. I chose a brown suit, a nice jumper, a shirt and even a tie. There were no shoes, but plenty of socks. The trousers were too long so I couldn't wear the suit straight away, but never mind. I told the man to wrap it all up. He didn't look very happy, but I was. He then

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spoke to the officers. I don't know if they had an arrangement, but I didn't see any money change hands. I hoped they didn't pay him anything. The experience reminded me of the beginning of the war when the German army arrived in Lodz and soldiers walked into Jewish shops taking whatever they wanted, often bashing the shopkeeper if he protested. Anyway, I didn't ask questions, but thanked them as I placed the parcel beside me in the back of the jeep. They seemed happy and said they were going to drive me back to Buchenwald. The journey took about an hour and it was late in the afternoon when we arrived. I asked if they wanted to see the place, but they didn't have time. I was so grateful and hugged and thanked them again. Such nice men.

I walked into my room carrying the parcels and told the boys about my adventure, unpacking and showing them my new clothes. They were happy for me. There was some news. Rabbi Schachter had come to ask who wanted to go to France. The French Red Cross was taking some boys there to recuperate. We all wanted to go, but there was a quota and I wasn't one of the two boys chosen from our room. They promised to return for more boys.

Then the Swiss Red Cross arrived, looking for children to take to Switzerland, but most of us were youths aged 15 to 19 and there was a quota. Rabbi Schachter organised a train and told us to gather our belongings before meeting the Red Cross woman representative. He said he would be travelling with us. I made the fateful mistake of wearing my new outfit. More than two months had passed since liberation, I had put on weight and grown hair. To sum up, I didn't look too bad. The woman took one look at me and said, '*Nein*' ('No'). I was shocked and upset as were the few others who weren't chosen. We told the rabbi what happened. He said, 'Never mind' and instructed his assistant (*shammes*) to take us all to the train at Buchenwald station. Only this time we did not meet cattle wagons, but beautiful passenger carriages instead. Many boys were looking out the windows and greeting friends, but

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I was in a compartment with boys I didn't know. Rabbi Schachter arrived with his *shammes* and was greeted noisily and with gratitude as he walked along the train. There were also American guards with us, but the Red Cross people had their own transport.

The train started to move slowly. We cast our last look at that cursed place Buchenwald and it slowly disappeared from view. We sang songs and hugged each other. We were so happy. We passed Weimar, Erfurt and some more towns before stopping for the night. We were given American army food and made ourselves as comfortable as possible inside the train, but it was hard to sleep. The next morning the train travelled further inside Germany and we could see the devastation from the bombing. I particularly remember the town Fulda where every visible building was damaged. It looked like a ghost town. It gave us great satisfaction to see the carnage.

Along the way we often shouted obscenities at Germans. Then our train approached the very large city, Frankfurt am Main. Allied bombing had destroyed the bridge over the Main river, so we crossed at a temporary structure built on pontoons. We were happy to see German soldiers demolish more damaged buildings. We stopped at another place for a meal. There were also some women and girls on our train and I remember how everyone applauded as an American soldier danced on the platform with one of them.

Finally, we crossed the border into France. It was a big moment leaving Germany, that horrible place that harmed so many. As we travelled through the French countryside, the realisation that I was really free made me want to shout loud and clear, 'Yes I'm alive and ready to conquer the world!' I got to know more people on the train, including some girls. One of them gave me her photograph.

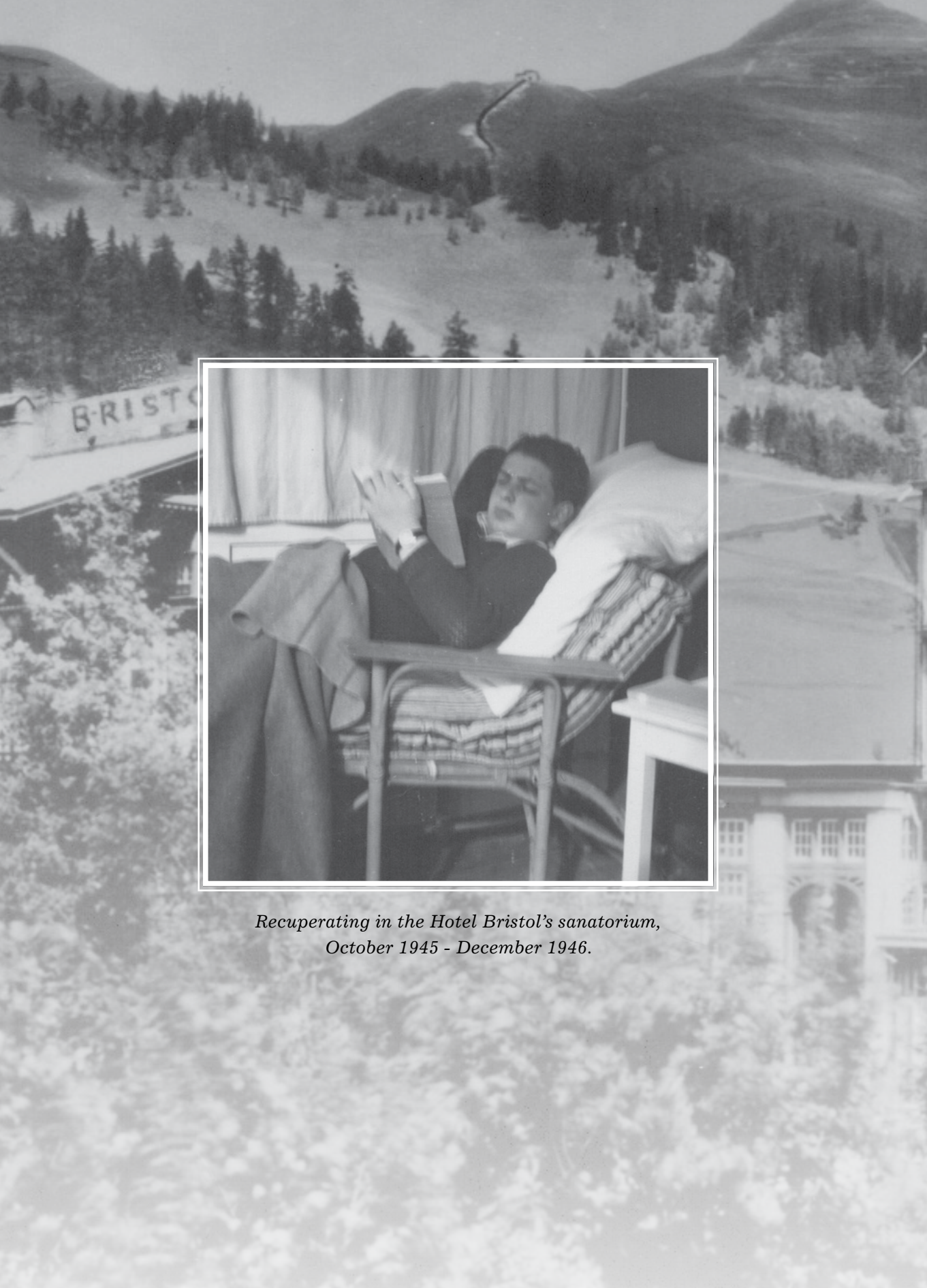
We arrived in the city of Metz, where we were spending the night. I don't recall if it was a hotel, hospital or other place, but it had beds. Before we went to sleep Rabbi Schachter announced there were too many of us, well above the quota. He asked for

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volunteers to leave the train here and go on to Palestine and said it was a good idea for the older boys. Only a few came forward. There were still too many of us. He said he would try to ensure we could all stay once we arrived in Switzerland, but there was a chance we may be sent back to Germany. We shuddered at the thought, but hoped for the best. At least Hitler wasn't there anymore.

After breakfast the next morning we boarded the train for our final part of the journey to the Swiss border. There was a lot of discussion about the rabbi's comments. Some said Switzerland would have to let us in because it would look bad if it didn't. Others weren't worried about being sent back as there was Palestine or somewhere else to go. Finally, the train stopped at the Swiss border. After some formalities we crossed the border and stopped at the railway station in the city of Basel. We were glued to the windows, looking up at a bridge where people were assembled, shouting questions at us. Who are you? Where have you come from? We saw Rabbi Schachter enter a building, accompanied by other Americans. They were inside for quite a long time while we answered questions from the people on the bridge. Then we saw the rabbi emerging from the building with a big smile on his face. He walked along the train platform and shouted, 'You're all staying; you're all staying!' We got off the train and kissed and hugged him and each other.

It was late June 1945. Switzerland here we are!



*Recuperating in the Hotel Bristol's sanatorium,  
October 1945 - December 1946.*

## SWITZERLAND

**A**fter farewelling Rabbi Schachter we boarded a Swiss train for the short journey to Rheinfelden before travelling on to an old hotel in the mountains of Gurnigelbad. Before the war only rich people could afford to stay there. Now it was welcoming children liberated from concentration camps! I still remember arriving to the surprised faces of the young nurses who were expecting a group of young children, not a mob of unruly 15 to 20-year-old boys. They were unaware that very few children survived the war. Anyway, we must have been difficult. It was a long time since we'd eaten a meal with friendly people and our behaviour and manners were terrible. After a while we improved, realising the staff wanted to help us.

The highlight of my short stay there was an excursion with some of the other boys and a guide. The place was surrounded by majestic mountains with spectacular views. My lungs filled with clean air and I wanted to yell with happiness, 'I'm alive! I've ascended from hell to heaven!' Other boys were also calling out and the echo effect was wonderful. The realisation we were free and on the threshold of a new life was slowly sinking in.

It was a big shock when doctors identified a spot on my lung and said they were sending me to a sanatorium for treatment. They assured me the condition wasn't serious and that I would recover fully. I still had doubts until hearing that people were coming to Switzerland from all over the world to be treated for tuberculosis. None of my friends were going there and it was a sad farewell as I wondered if we'd ever meet again.

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Eight of us travelled on the bus to the sanatorium. We had all been at Buchenwald, but lived in different blocks. Aron Schlomovitz was originally from Riga; Elias Zylberberg, Charlie Spicer, Benjamin Nugelblat, Leib Wieza, Moshe Kravetz and another boy named Geminder came from other Polish towns. We got to know each other by the time we reached our destination.

Barmelweid Sanatorium was a nice place near the town of Aarau. Six of us shared a big room with a glass partition down the middle and we had a view of the beautiful garden. The youngest boys, Aron and Moshe, were elsewhere. We were seated separately in the dining room, which was filled with Swiss children from about eight to 18. They looked at us with curiosity. They probably hadn't met a foreigner before. The food was delicious and plentiful. There were no adults, so we thought this must be a place for children only. After dinner the Swiss children asked us many questions, but they were hard to understand as they spoke the Swiss dialect of German, which was similar to Yiddish. We all spoke German, some better than others.

The next morning Dr Schliom and Dr Kowalski came to examine us. Surprise, surprise, they were Jewish, not what we expected in a Swiss sanatorium. Maybe they were Swiss citizens. Anyway they told us not to worry. We underwent various tests, x-rays and exercises. Luckily I didn't need any medications, but just rest, good food, fresh air and walks. Only two of us had to have regular injections. Every so often we had an x-ray to check our progress.

Apart from eating, resting and sleeping, we did a lot of talking, often about the camps. After listening to other boys' stories, I concluded mine was terrible, but certainly not the worst. Benjamin was surprisingly cheerful despite having had his leg broken from repeated beatings. He walked with a limp, but said his leg could be repaired if it was rebroken and reset, which he'd get done one day.

We appreciated our situation and the care we were receiving, but had fun mocking things that were different and strange. New

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subjects of conversation were girls and sex. We were now well fed and our bodies responded to having nurses and other girls around. We were all virgins, had wet dreams and joked about what we would like to do, but it was all fantasy. Everything here was strictly supervised. I had my eye on a beautiful blonde girl called Leoni who was about 16. She must have sensed my feelings because she looked at me too, but that's as far as it ever went. I spoke to her briefly once or twice when there was no teacher around and she gave me a photo of herself with a friend. We didn't mix with other patients much and so were objects of interest. Miss Pagels, the head teacher, was very understanding and explained many things about the place.

Our stay was marred by a particularly distressing episode when we were quizzed by three members of the Swiss *Fremderpolizei* (aliens' police). They were dressed in uniforms similar to those worn by the German SS and asked us for personal details, took our fingerprints and confiscated our documents from Buchenwald, threatening to send us back if we didn't behave. We had a strong sense they wished we weren't there. Dealing with any authority revived bad memories of terrible things. We were disgusted by the experience, but soon cheered up knowing we were free now and no one could hurt us.

Often we walked with a male teacher who explained the surrounding area and landscape. We could see fields and farmhouses as well as barbed wire, which he said provided protection against invasion, as we were close to the German border. Germany needed Switzerland which was neutral, but the Swiss had no illusions and were ready to defend themselves. They had a geographic advantage of many high mountains. He also told us about Germany's plan for Switzerland: *Schweiz, das kleine stachel Schwein. Nehmen wir auf dem ruckweg ein.* (Switzerland, the little prickly pig, we will take it on the way back). The words meant Switzerland would be the last European country for Germany to conquer.



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On another occasion we agreed to our teacher's request to help a farmer to harvest potatoes. We arrived at a neat farmhouse and were welcomed by the farmer, his wife and two teenage daughters who gave us buckets for the potatoes. It was our first manual work since the camps and we enjoyed it because there were no kapos with whips watching. The farmer invited us back to the house for a delicious lunch prepared by his daughters of fresh bread, cheese, eggs, yoghurt and apple juice. I think we may have been the first foreigners they had ever met. The teacher told them our stories and they were very sympathetic. They appreciated our hard work and invited us to return for a social visit. Our teacher said we had made a good impression, but the daughters didn't appeal to us so we decided not to return.

At the end of July, Miss Pagels told us August 1st marked an important national holiday celebrating more than 600 years of Swiss federation. We were invited to join the locals for singing, dancing and fireworks. The children made decorations. It was a beautiful afternoon with speeches and singing. We didn't understand much, but Miss Pagels provided a running commentary. We waved flags and danced – in a fashion – with the nurses. Miss Pagels also told us a legend about a Swiss national hero of the same period, Wilhelm (William) Tell, the best bowman of his time. Sentenced to death for resisting his Austrian oppressor (Austria ruled part of Switzerland at the time), he was offered a pardon if he shot an arrow through an apple, placed on the head of his young son, without hurting him. He was successful and took revenge by killing the man who ordered it and escaped to lead a rebellion. A fascinating story.

Early in September we had a surprise visit by a rabbi from a small congregation in the neighbouring town of Wohlen to invite us to its Rosh Hashanah services. He said we would be billeted with Jewish families who were very keen to have us.

We arrived in time for the evening service. The shul was in a

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small building, a *shtiebel*, and we were welcomed by the same rabbi. There weren't many congregants. After prayers a few men invited us for dinner and to spend the night at their homes. A man with two sons said he would be honoured for me to be their guest. I was pleasantly surprised by his manner. Their home was close by and when I arrived his wife welcomed me very warmly and repeated her husband's sentiments.

The *yomtov* table was beautifully set with a candelabra and food I had not seen or tasted for years: challah, gefilte fish and also wine. It reminded me of my home before the war and I had tears in my eyes. The lady could see I was distressed, put her arms around me and guided me to a seat. They were liberal, similar to my family. Originally from Poland, they had lived in Switzerland for many years. Maybe that was why the food was so similar to my mother's. The chicken soup with lokshen was great. Chicken with potatoes and compote followed and tea and cake finished a delicious meal. Afterwards we sat for a while and they listened spellbound to my story. I shared a room with the boys and they asked me questions well into the night. The next morning after breakfast, the lady said I would spend the remainder of the Holydays with another family. She had tears in her eyes as she gave me a kiss and hug and wished me luck.

The next day the shul was full and the rabbi called us all up to read the Torah. Being a Cohen I was first. I was overcome with emotion. The last time I was on a bimah was at my bar mitzvah with my father and two brothers next to me. After the service my previous host introduced me to my new hosts, an elderly couple, their daughter, son-in-law, young grandson and baby granddaughter. On the way to their place we exchanged a few polite words. Their background was Hungarian, but they had lived here for a long time. Their home was beautiful and the table was all ready for the meal. They were more Orthodox than the previous family, which is why I may have felt ill at ease, but as the delicious

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meal progressed, the ice was broken and we enjoyed interesting conversation.

A bus collected us from the shul to take us back to Barmelweid. We thanked the rabbi for organising this special visit. He put his arm around each of us and promised to visit us again. We all had a good time and were treated with respect and compassion by the host families.

We had been missed and received a warm welcome at the sanatorium. I think we may have been popular because we participated in many activities. I didn't really enjoy drawing and painting, but I liked words and my German was good enough to retell stories I remembered from childhood.

One day we staged an animal silhouette show. We darkened the room except for the back wall and made hand and body movements and animal noises behind a white sheet. It was well received, especially by the younger children. The teachers sensed we were getting restless, but encouraged us to make the most of our experience in Switzerland and said many people would help us in the times ahead. We wanted so much to believe them.

We were surprised again when about 50 boys from Gurnigelbad came to visit. They were scattered around different places, but were living close by and organised a bus for transport. They told us the Jewish welfare society would be active in managing our progress. We took a group photo. Seeing them made us happy, but even more restless. After three months, it was time to move on.

Our doctors must have read our thoughts because they said six of us were moving to a sanatorium in Davos. High in the mountains, it was renowned for healing tuberculosis. It was also a famous tourist destination and had been a place for rich people to holiday before the war. Leib and Moshe would stay at Barmelweid with other children of their age.

We would be travelling on our own now. I think it was one morning in November 1945 when we left. Leoni gave me a photo,

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everyone wished us luck and Miss Pagels had tears in her eyes as she hugged us. We took a bus to Aarau and then a train to Zurich where we got off for a few hours. We came out of the railway station right onto Zurich's main street, Bahnhofstrasse, and kept walking. It was a revelation – crowds of well-dressed people, shop windows full of all kinds of merchandise, restaurants, trams, cars, tall buildings and picture theatres. Here we were, six young boys in shabby clothes, wide-eyed in wonderment. Were we really in hell just a few months ago?

At the end of the street we could see a lake with a promenade and benches. It was a warm day despite being winter and what an idyllic picture – couples holding hands, women pushing babies in strollers, children running around and boats sailing on the lake. But our cheerfulness that day was short-lived. We were sitting down enjoying our sandwiches, chatting and laughing when a man appeared, pulled out a police badge and asked why we were there. Aaron acted as spokesman, told him we were going to Davos and showed him our tickets. Satisfied, he left. It wasn't a big thing, but we were still fragile and the incident dampened our spirits.

We decided to go back to the railway station and wait for the train to Chur where we transferred to a special train called Rhatische Bahn which could travel to high altitudes. Davos was near the top of the Alps and the scenery was breathtaking. Picturesque villages were covered in snow and we could see people walking with their skis. We were overwhelmed by the sights. 'Look at that chalet! Oh, that horse-drawn sleigh with happy passengers!' There were more snow-covered trees and mountains of various shapes and sizes. We were very noisy and attracted the attention of other passengers, but we didn't care. We were overwhelmed by feelings of euphoria. This was not a dream from which we would wake up in Buchenwald, but it was wonderful reality – we were alive!

The train stopped in the town of Klosters (later a favourite skiing destination of Prince Charles). A few skiers got off and the

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train continued to Davos. We alighted at the first station, Davos Dorf. There was no one to greet us so we asked for directions and walked to our sanatorium, Hotel Bristol. It was an old building with a garden in the front. We arrived at dinner time and everyone looked at us. The manager led us to a table and said he'd take us to our rooms after we ate. The food was tasty and plentiful. Our first impression was good.

I was glad to be sharing a fourth-floor room with Eliaz as we'd become good friends. There was a balcony with two canvas beds and the view was spectacular. We were told the daily routine consisted of breakfast, a walk, then free time. After lunch we were to rest on the balcony for *liege kure* (lying down cure). Breathing fresh air was part of our treatment. Then we would walk again and enjoy time until dinner. Later we could socialise and play games. It all sounded like hard work (ha, ha).

The next morning, we talked to some of the other patients, men and women of different ages including Polish soldiers, Yugoslavs, a few Jews and Greeks. The only thing we had in common was that we were all sick.

Our first walk was eventful because we met some Buchenwald boys who were living in other sanatoriums in Davos. Apparently after we left Gurnigelbad, they discovered more boys needed treatment. Some went to Etania, a Jewish establishment. Others, including Moniek Rose who became a lifelong friend, were sent to Park sanatorium.

A few days later a Jewish welfare organisation representative came to tell us about an educational and social centre where we could meet other Jews. He gave us some good second-hand clothes and I was very grateful for a warm overcoat. We got some pocket money and joined weekly Jewish studies classes.

Back home for lunch I noticed a man distributing mail. I told the boys it was time to start writing letters to find out what happened to our families. I addressed mine to the Jewish community in Lodz,

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named my family members and hoped for an answer.

We became friendly with some Polish soldiers who had been stationed in France and crossed the border to Switzerland to avoid capture by the Germans. We played table tennis with them. Charlie was a very good player and usually won. I had mixed luck in chess. We befriended a Yugoslav boy who must have been jealous of us because he said, 'You Jewish people look after each other and nobody cares about me.' His remark made me realise it wasn't good being Jewish during the war, but now it had its advantages. I also became friendly with a Greek boy. I'd never met a Greek person before and asked about his customs. He said a Greek friend was a friend for life, but you would never want one as an enemy.

Socialising broadened my mind and I gained confidence with women. We attended dances that were held every weekend and some of the women taught us to dance. A beautiful Greek woman with long black hair took a fancy to me and held me tight as we danced. Of course I got excited, especially when the lights were switched off. But when I thought about her husband who often visited and remembered my friend's remarks about Greek enemies, I decided to avoid her.

We loved walking along the main street. I remember seeing a beautiful pair of brown shoes in a shop window. I had no money and felt like the proverbial dog looking into a butcher shop window with its tongue hanging out. There were photographers who took pictures of passers-by on the street and displayed them for sale on boards the following day.

From the main road we could see a skating rink and watch figure skating. I was also introduced to the game of curling in which a player slides a metal object resembling a kettle along the ice and two other players run ahead sweeping the ice furiously with a broom to make it go faster. It looked funny and we laughed like crazy.

It was a very special moment when I went to the pictures for

the first time since seeing *Pasteur* with Paul Muni in Lodz before the war. I don't recall the name of the movie, but it starred Frank Sinatra. I was not impressed. He was skinny, not at all good looking and I didn't like his voice. Well, that was my opinion!

Back in Davos, I had a wonderful surprise when the mailman stopped at our table to give me a letter. When I saw the sender was Jadzia I screamed, 'It's from my sister!' and ran to my room to read it. The news was not good. She and Mama had been liberated in Czechoslovakia, but Mama had passed away three weeks later on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945. It was a terrible shock, but I couldn't cry. *Moja Mama* (my mother) was only 51. I was so angry. She was still quite fit and healthy after nearly five years in the ghetto, but the bastards managed to kill her in the camp after only a few months.

The boys came rushing into my room to hear about the letter. When I told them what had happened, they put their arms around me and that's when I became emotional. 'Why, why after liberation? At the threshold of a new life,' I cried. One of the boys tried to cheer me up by saying, 'At least she saw the downfall of Hitler.' The next few days were quite traumatic. My new friends offered their sympathy and the older men tried to console me. There was the German Jew who lost an arm in World War One fighting in the German army. He was a decorated hero, but it counted for nothing because he was a Jew and was lucky to escape here.

I had come to terms with the possibility of losing members of my family, but until it happened, there was always hope. Jadzia had written that Mama's younger sister Cesia and her husband had survived, living outside the Warsaw Ghetto with Polish papers. Cesia had seen my letter on the noticeboard at the community office in Lodz and told Jadzia, who had returned there after Mama died. They wanted Jadzia to live with them and go to school there, but she was desperate to leave and joined some young people who smuggled themselves across the border to an established kibbutz in Germany. Their ultimate wish was to go to Palestine. I had heard

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about an underground organisation which tried to send European Jews there despite England's efforts to stop them.

Naturally Jadzia was overjoyed to hear about me. Her early letters were opened by the military censor and I wondered if any of the content was valuable. She also sent photos, but didn't look like my little sister anymore: she'd grown into an attractive young woman. One photo showed her at a sewing machine. She asked me to write back, but I didn't have much news except that I was getting better and having a good time.

With the Polish soldiers came women. Hanka was a waitress and brought plenty of food to our table. I spoke to her in Polish and she always smiled at me. One afternoon I met her in the hallway and she invited me to her room after dinner to 'see something nice from Poland'. I finished my meal quickly and rushed to see her. She opened the door in a dressing gown and said she thought I might be afraid to come. 'Oh no, I'm interested in anything from Poland,' I replied. She showed me everything she had. I never believed anything from Poland could be so good. After a couple of hours, I returned to my room with a big smile. The boys didn't believe my story, but I didn't care. I think some of them were probably jealous. Each time I saw Hanka I asked if she had something new from Poland, but the answer was always 'no'. I was resigned to the fact it was a one-off, but there were plenty of other women with nice things to show me from their home country.

The Jewish organisation's classes were led by Miss Rowinska, a high school teacher in Poland before the war. She was an expert in all the subjects and I learned a lot from her. She was also genuinely interested in our welfare and suggested we attend school in Zurich after leaving the sanatorium.

Many friendships were formed at the Jewish sanatorium, Etania, where we would get together, usually on Fridays. We sang in Yiddish and Hebrew and discussed our futures. Most boys wanted to go to Palestine. None of us were interested in returning to our





*Max and his twin sister Jadzia in Torino, Italy,  
July 1947*



*Max visits Jadzia's grave on the 50th anniversary  
of her death, May 29<sup>th</sup> 2000*



*Max in Davos,  
January 1946*



*Max by the lake, Geneva,  
April 1946*



*Max in Zurich,  
1947*



*Max's student ID Card from Winterthur  
Technical College, March 1947.*



*Max's monogrammed leather wallet  
he made in Zurich, 1947*



*Max's Graduation Certificate of  
Capacity, Geneva, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1948.*



*Max in the mountains with Elias Zylberberg,  
Aron Schlomowitz and others, July 1946*



*On the town in Davos (I'm second from left) with Charlie Spicer, Moniek Rose, Aron Schlomovitz and other friends, October 1945.*



*Tobogganing in Davos with Moniek Rose, Elias Zylberberg, Charlie Spicer, Aron Schlomowitz and others, July 1946*

birthplace. I struck up a friendship with a lovely girl called Fanny from Zurich, who worked in the office of the Jewish organisation. We went for a walk a few times.

I received another lovely surprise when my friend with one arm, who had many good contacts, organised for me to spend a night with a family in Zurich and see Verdi's opera *Aida*, performed by the Zurich Opera Company. He also got me a return rail ticket. I was speechless and didn't know how to thank him. He knew I liked music and assumed correctly that I had never been to the opera. Lately I had met so many nice people I was beginning to change my outlook.

One afternoon around Christmas time my friend walked me to the Davos Dorf station and said Mr and Mrs Trub would be waiting for me in Zurich. I was so grateful that I hugged him despite his protests. It was evening when my train finally arrived and from his description I was able to quickly locate my hosts, a middle-aged couple. There was a short walk to their apartment, where a table was already prepared for dinner. They could sense I was nervous and probably knew about my situation, so they didn't ask any questions. After a delicious dinner, the ice was broken when they asked how my love for classical music evolved and I told them about my brother Heniek. They said I would be attending a Saturday afternoon performance which was staged particularly for young people. I admitted my complete ignorance about *Aida* so they explained the story. I noticed a piano near the corner of the room that confirmed they were music lovers.

At the end of dinner Mrs Trub brought out a parcel as a souvenir of my stay. It was a biography of my favourite composer Beethoven and signed, 'Xmas 1945, the Trub family.' I was lost for words.

The next morning, they took me on a tour of Zurich. First we visited Jelmoli, the city's biggest store. I was greatly impressed with the beautiful menswear. I could only look not buy, but hoped one day to be able to buy a nice suit like the ones I saw there. Later

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we went for a walk along the promenade at Lake Zurich. Even though it was winter, there was no snow and people were walking, sitting on benches and watching boats while children ran around. We ate lunch at a nearby restaurant before they took me to the opera hall. It was time to say goodbye to my hosts and thank them for everything.

The interior of the hall was magnificent. I had never seen anything like it. The seats extended around the whole room and the walls and ceiling were exquisitely decorated. My seat was on the ground level close to the stage.

Applause greeted the conductor when he lifted his baton for the overture and the curtain opened to a backdrop representing Pharaoh's Egypt. *Aida* was written in Italian, but here everything was sung in German, which made it easier for me to understand. I was greatly impressed and even remembered some words from the main aria. I promised myself I'd attend more opera if I ever lived in Zurich.

Back in Davos, a fellow resident who used to be a leather manufacturer offered to teach us how to make goods such as bags, belts and wallets. I made myself a wallet with the initials M. Z.

A large group of us was transferred to a more modern building behind Bristol, called Pension Aela. Eliaz and I were allocated a room on the third floor which was much nicer than our old one. Our balcony was larger and it even had a blind to block out the sun and give us privacy. It was a good change.

We were treated to another wonderful outing when we all went to the top of Parsenn, Davos' highest mountain. The Jewish organisation arranged for us to take a special mountain railway train that also carried skiers. We heard Parsenn's ski runs were among the best in Switzerland and the American army sent soldiers there for some R&R. We watched in amazement at some of their antics. It was obvious most of them had never worn skis, but they still slid downwards not knowing how to stop. Onlookers

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laughed and took photos. I wondered how many ankles were broken. We spoke to some of them who said they were happy the war was over and hoped to return home soon. I thought how lucky they were to have homes and families waiting. It was a beautiful clear day. There was lots of snow, but it was still warm. The view was magnificent and again I felt gratitude for my life improving so dramatically in such a short time.

April 1946 was an eventful month. On the 11<sup>th</sup> we celebrated the first anniversary of our liberation from Buchenwald with a party at the Jewish organisation premises. Some of boys brought souvenir SS uniforms and prisoners' striped suits, only this time, the prisoners were bashing up the SS men. It was a very happy occasion with hope for a wonderful future.

We also celebrated Pesach for the first time since the war. The *maca* (matzah) tasted good. The seders were conducted by our Jewish history teacher. It made me appreciate I belonged to the Jewish race and would always stand up for myself. From now on it was 'tit for tat'.

Out of the blue, Aaron, Charlie and I were called to the manager's office and told we were cured and would be leaving Davos. Until accommodation was organised in Zurich, we would be staying at Schloss Castle in Hilfikon where the *Fremderpolizei* housed refugees. It wasn't far from Aarau and Barmelweid. We were glad, but also sorry to leave this beautiful place. Fanny gave me her phone number in Zurich as she was planning to leave Davos soon too.

The castle was awe-inspiring. Our room was so large it was more like a dormitory. A painted border of full-size chickens extended along the walls of the entire room. I enjoyed waking up to chickens that were silent. We met Fraulein Zistli, a teacher who helped the manager. It's funny how I remembered some names and not others.

We spent our time going for walks, visiting and helping local farmers and reading books. An Austrian man we met defended his country's role in the war by saying it had no choice as Germany

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occupied it by force. Was he stupid or naive? He wouldn't acknowledge that the Austrians welcomed Hitler with open arms and became willing partners in his crimes. In fact, they were often worse than the Germans.

Redirected letters kept coming from my sister who was becoming more proficient in sewing. She and her friends were getting impatient, waiting to be transferred to Italy. We were both hoping to meet again soon, but it didn't look very promising right now.

When we learnt our Zurich accommodation was ready, it was another farewell of mixed feelings. We were glad to move on, but also sorry because we'd had a nice holiday and had become close to the teachers. Miss Zistli even knitted jumpers for us.

Aaron and I got a room in the Bumbacher pension at Falken Strasse 23. It was in a great location and within walking distance to the lake, opera, picture theatres and station. Apart from us, there were two students from Luxemburg and two from Switzerland. I became good friends with Swiss student Peter Lager who had a magnificent voice and was studying piano and singing at the Conservatorium of Music. He had a separate room in the attic where he could practise without disturbing anyone. I loved to sit in his room and listen to him sing and play piano. One day I had an idea for a song which I wanted to call *March into Life* and asked if he'd write down the notes as I hummed the melody. He was happy to do so, signed the composition as a souvenir of our friendship and played the tune. I was deeply touched because it described my life at that particular time: I was marching into life, hoping for the best. (I still have that piece of paper some 67 years later and treasure it. Peter became a famous opera singer and I saw his name on opera posters when I visited Berlin some 40 years later, but sadly I didn't get to see him again as he died young.)

People from the Swiss Jewish welfare society were now in charge. They subsidised our living and educational expenses. We got the bare minimum of clothing – one pair of shoes, two pairs



of trousers, a coat etc. They asked about my plans for education and work, but I wasn't sure. They gave us aptitude tests and said I could go to high school, but I wanted to be able to make a living. They recommended that Aaron and I should sit for the entry exam to Zurich's prestigious engineering school, Technikum Winterthur. But first we would undertake a short, intensive course at the Institute Juventus which prepared students for special exams. It was especially difficult because German was not our first language and while we could speak it fluently, we struggled in written text. I used to write, 'Please note German is not my childhood language' on the top of every essay, hoping it would help.

Studying was made even more difficult because we were surrounded by so many distractions and temptations. One of them was the lake and all the friendly girls who used to go there. I learned quickly that starting a conversation with them by mentioning the weather was the wrong approach. You had to be original and gain a girl's interest in the first sentence so she felt obliged to answer. I tried this: 'Fraulein, I would like to start a conversation with you, but am not sure how.' Often it worked and my foreign accent helped because they wanted to know where I came from. None of this helped my studies of course, but I tried to balance everything as best I could.

We got to know other Buchenwald boys at the Jewish welfare society and became good friends. Some had jobs and others were working as trade apprentices. A few of them rented rooms from Swiss Jewish families, while the others lived at pensions with full board, like us. We often felt lonely and so welcomed each other's company. We even formed an official Buchenwald group, electing a committee and writing a constitution which stated we must always help one another.

We also produced a magazine called *Neues Leben* (New Life), which I co-edited with Kurt Walach, a German boy who was in charge of proofreading. It came out in April 1947, exactly two

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years after liberation. The main article titled 'Today, two years ago' described our liberation from Buchenwald. We published an editorial explaining the reason for the magazine and reproduced our constitution, signed by committee president Janek Kruger. We also featured interviews with people from the welfare society and invited contributions. Unfortunately however, due to circumstances beyond our control, we didn't produce another edition.

We often ate at a restaurant run by a Swiss women's society which was part of a country-wide chain offering cheap, nourishing meals. I think I was introduced to yoghurt there. It was very tasty and served plain in little jars. But in those days I thought any food was good. We had breakfast and dinner at our pension, but ate lunch elsewhere, usually in cafeterias close to school.

One day, Fanny phoned to invite me to her home in Zurich. I wasn't experienced with girls in Davos, but considered myself more sophisticated now and was confident about knowing how to behave. I planned to kiss her when she opened the door, but her mother was standing with her so I just said hello and shook hands. She introduced me to her father and younger brother who were playing chess. At first I felt ill at ease, but relaxed over afternoon tea. After some small talk, I played chess with Fanny's brother, but made the fatal mistake of winning which upset the whole family. Luckily Fanny was unaffected and suggested we go to the pictures. I assumed she meant just the two of us, but when I returned to pick her up, her mother was all dressed up to come along. I said I didn't mind, but privately I thought she was a big girl who didn't need a chaperone. Anyway, her mother paid for the tickets.

Fanny led the way to the cinema holding her mother's arm. I felt stupid walking behind them, but thought it could be a Swiss Jewish custom because I noticed the girls I met near the lake behaved differently. After having coffee and a nice chat in a café, Fanny's mother mentioned the Jewish community annual ball was approaching and it was an important occasion on the calendar.

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I think it had something to do with girls coming of age. Anyway she looked expectantly at Fanny who then asked me to be her partner. I was completely taken aback. I'd never been to a ball, didn't have a suit and my dancing experience was limited to the casual tuition at Davos. But when I told some boys, they said not to worry. Someone brought a dark suit that fitted me perfectly and my close friend Gabriel Rose, a natural dancer, promised to teach me properly. He showed me the Jitterbug as well as the Tango, Foxtrot and Waltz, which confused me even more.

Finally, the day of the ball arrived. I looked in the mirror and thought I looked good, all dressed up and with a new haircut. Fanny opened the door in a stunning ball gown. Her mother stood next to her smiling, but this time she wasn't coming with us and I breathed a sigh of relief. The taxi arrived and I even scored a kiss from her mother. I was hoping to get one from Fanny in the back of the taxi.

At the function centre we were shown to a nice table and Fanny knew many of the other people. I saw Gabriel and thought he was the best dancer there. Reluctantly, I asked Fanny for a dance and must have managed not to step on her toes because she didn't complain. I wondered if she was enjoying my company, but the smile on her face looked encouraging. It was a beautiful ball and again I was so grateful to be able to enjoy such wonderful things.

We returned to Fanny's by taxi and I managed to put my arm around her. We chatted happily about how much we enjoyed the evening and each other's company – and yes, I got a kiss. I didn't go into her house this time, but promised we'd meet again soon.

Our entry exam for Winterthur was looming. We felt well prepared, but our fellow residents were pessimistic. They said Winterthur was one of the best schools in Switzerland and had very high standards. Aaron and I decided just to do our best. We had nothing to lose, but everything to gain. I don't remember much about the exam, except there were many people in the hall sitting for different exams. I did the electrical technician exam

## SWITZERLAND

while Aaron did the one for architecture. We were advised we'd receive our results in two weeks.

Back at the breakfast table we agreed we'd probably failed as the exam was so difficult. Two weeks passed and we received a letter saying we would be accepted into the school if we completed a successful trial period. We made our triumphant announcement at breakfast the next morning. Everyone's jaws dropped and then they congratulated us. We were due to start in April 1947.

Jadzia wrote to me with dates she planned to visit a kibbutz in Konstanz, a German town near the Swiss border. I wanted to try and meet her there. The welfare society was very helpful, getting me a day pass to cross the Swiss/German border and a train ticket to Schaffhausen, the closest town. I wrote to Jadzia with the time and place and hoped for the best. I managed to get some clothing for her. It was a long walk from the station and finally I saw a lone Swiss border guard. I showed him my pass and walked a few steps to be back on German soil.

I could see some girls in the distance and started walking in their direction. One of them began running towards me. Yes, it was Jadzia! We fell into each other's arms, kissing and crying at the same time. How our lives had changed in two and a half years! We walked to the kibbutz, sat down at a table and caught up with our lost years.

Jadzia explained the circumstances of Mama's death. She was with her until she died on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1945, three weeks after liberation. Mama had been admitted to hospital in the Czech town of Zelezný Brod. They looked after her well, but nothing could be done. Jadzia stayed a while longer and witnessed how respectfully the Czechs treated the deceased camp survivors by erecting a monument in the most prominent spot of their local cemetery where 11 Jews were buried, including my mother. It became a sort of shrine where local people went to pay their respects on the anniversary of liberation. I was very proud of my little sister who had to organise the burial by herself.

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Jadzia then returned to Lodz hoping to locate somebody from our family. She found only our mother's sister Cesia. Jadzia stayed with Cesia for a while, but was eager to go to Palestine with other young people.

My visit to Germany lasted only a few hours as I had to return to Switzerland. Back in Zurich, I was deeply affected by our emotional reunion and hoped we'd get to meet again soon.

School started at 8am and I remember running to the station with Aaron every morning in the freezing cold. From the beginning I realised it was not going to be easy. I was the only foreigner in our class and the other students looked at me curiously, but they were mostly very friendly. Some subjects, such as Chemistry were particularly difficult because they were new to me, but familiar to the Swiss students. The teachers were friendly and understanding, except for the French teacher, an older man who was very unpleasant.

We usually ate lunch at a local restaurant where I really enjoyed *roesti* (Swiss potatoes). One day on the way to lunch, a uniformed policeman picked me out of a large group of students and asked who I was and why I was there. I showed him my student identification. He looked at it and let me go. I was very relieved and wondered why he chose me.

Another day our German teacher asked us to write an essay on our favourite topic. Remembering the book from the Trub family, I chose to focus on the life of Beethoven. The teacher congratulated me and said apart from the grammar and punctuation, it was a very good essay.

In the meantime, I received news from Jadzia that the kibbutz had moved to a huge Jewish refugee camp in a beautiful town called Gruglisco in Torino, Italy. Abe Jason, the brother of my good friend and Buchenwalder, Chaim Jason, was there too. School holidays were coming up so I began working on a plan to visit her again. I managed to scrape some money together and went.

The camp was close to the centre of Torino, also home to the Fiat

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car factory. Conditions were very basic. Residents were housed in a former barracks, divided into tiny rooms which were separated by blankets hanging off wire. Jadzia's room consisted of a bunk bed and a set of drawers. She introduced me to her boyfriend Idek Blumenfeld. I was taken by surprise, but he seemed to be a nice man, so who was I to interfere?

I spent about three weeks there and the camp was a hive of activity. There were people from many different countries, but mainly Poland and Romania. They existed on rations provided by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) which distributed prepared meals and bread. It was an interesting life. Many young Jews were very enterprising. Everyone was looking for a place to resettle and we received daily reports of people being accepted into particular countries or smuggling themselves into places such as Palestine. From time to time we heard cries of happiness from people who must have received immigration permits.

I had limited time so we decided to explore Italy a little bit and took a train to the port of Genoa. Trains at that time were old and cramped, but they provided cheap transport. The views were wonderful and we managed to see a lot with little money. I had brought along some school books, hoping to study, but it was hopeless and I hardly opened them. In Genoa we stayed in a hotel that charged by the hour. Everything was very interesting. We saw some big ships and I looked at one longingly, dreaming about travelling to faraway lands one day. Back on the kibbutz I met two workmates from the ghetto. One of them, Adam Chisick, was a communist. Many of us who worked in the factory back then were that way inclined.

The three of us boys sometimes walked into Torino and noticed many brothels, which were all over Italy at that time. Most street corners had signs showing a circle around a dash, indicating there was a brothel in every direction. The quality establishments

## MARCH INTO LIFE

were a revelation, with girls displaying their wares in provocative fashion. Often a man would approach a woman while others watched whistling and laughing. We decided to be just observers.

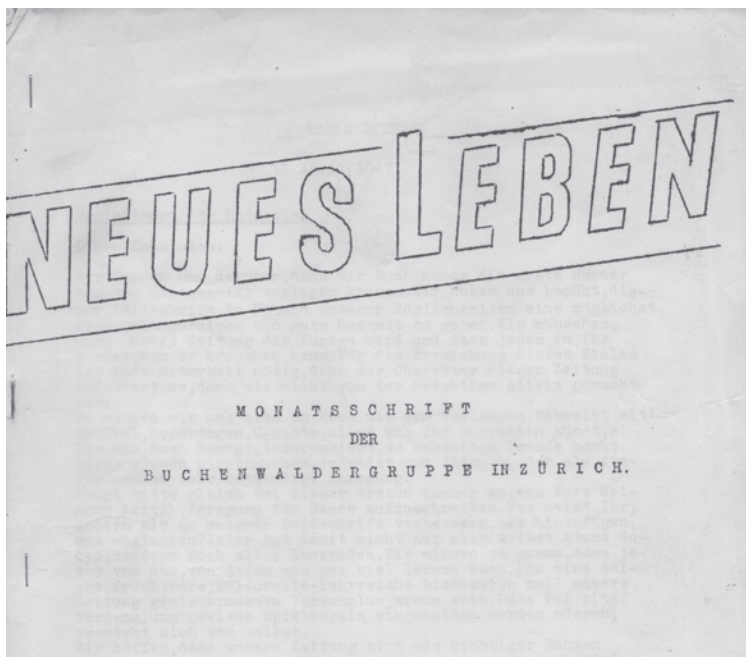
When it was time to go I caught a train from Milan to Zurich. Once again it was very difficult to leave Jadzia behind.

Back at Winterthur, I felt a deep sense of uselessness and didn't think I could continue studying there. By a strange coincidence, Aaron felt the same. Then we were informed our trial period had expired and the school would not be offering us a place. The section head Mr Prokoff was very nice and gave me his card in case I needed his assistance. We both left feeling regret and relief; regret because we had an opportunity to study at one of Zurich's top institutes and relief because we were not ready to take on such complex courses, with only our limited Polish pre-war education behind us. But most importantly, we had to decide what to do now.

I had heard about ORT, a Jewish educational college for skilled trades including electricians, which was building a new campus outside Geneva. We received a little money from the welfare society and I managed to find a room and befriended some Buchenwald boys who were already studying and living there. I enrolled in an electrical technicians' course and gained some valuable hands-on work experience helping with the building's construction.

My year in Geneva was very pleasant; a good mix of study and socialising. I picked up some French and attended an English school to perfect my fluency. We went dancing at a big club called Winter Palace which played jazz and swing and I also enjoyed going to small cabarets to dance and meet local girls.

*The sole edition of the Neues Leben (New Life) magazine, which Max produced for Buchenwald group members, 1947.*



Marsch ins Leben. (Max Zylberman)

op. 1

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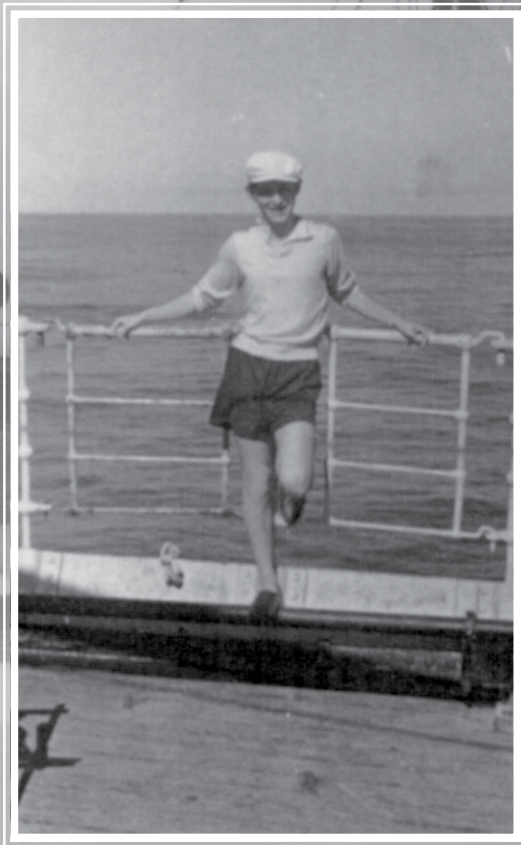
Zu fröhlicher  
Liedern  
Der Lachen  
Viel Lachen  
Zu fröhlich  
5. IV. 1947

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*The music to the song March into Life, which Max hummed to composer Peter Lager, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1947 and chose as title of this book.*





*Max on board the SS L'Eridan*

## LEAVING FOR AUSTRALIA

One day someone from Jewish Welfare called all the boys together to ask who wanted to go to Australia. (Previously we [the Buchenwalders] were offered passage to Israel, but I wasn't a Zionist and I didn't want to go.) There weren't many of us in Geneva, so only a few put their hands up, including me, Joe and Baruch Bekiermaszyn (later known as Baker), Motek Ackerfeld and Sam Lenga. We were told we'd have to make our way to Paris first and would travel in two groups. Motek and I went together three months after the others.

People in Switzerland didn't know much about Australia at that time. All I'd heard was that it was a good country. I knew of Sydney and Melbourne and wanted to learn more so I went to the university library in Geneva and looked up Australia in the 1948 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. There were very few pages on the subject.

Of course there were many boys I had left behind in Zurich who also wanted to go to Australia. It was very traumatic because I loved Switzerland and I was leaving good friends. They all came to the train station to say goodbye.

There was no Australian consul in Switzerland at the time so all the documentation was handled by the British consulate in Geneva. The plan was to spend a short time in Paris before taking a train to Marseille from where we would board a ship to Australia. The first voyage was organised quickly, but I was chosen for the second ship scheduled to leave in October 1948.

We travelled all night to Paris where we were met by

## MARCH INTO LIFE

representatives of OSE (*Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants*), a French Jewish humanitarian organisation. They sent us to an orphanage outside Paris for French Jewish kids who had lost their parents during the war. The boys were excited to see us and asked a lot of questions. They wanted to come with us. I remember being annoyed because we were already around 22 and the boys there were only 14 or 15. But it would have been cheap accommodation for OSE.

We were directed back to Paris where we met up with Charlie Spicer and Gabriel Rose who had come from Zurich. We had a meeting with a woman from OSE who handed over our travel documents and itinerary.

The first group had departed on schedule and our group was booked on a French ship called L'Eridan. We expected to board immediately on arrival in Marseille, but there was a maritime strike. As no one could estimate how long it would last, Jewish Welfare officials placed us in cheap hotels and organised daily lunch and dinner at different restaurants.

Once again our destiny was disrupted. Marseille was a dirty and dangerous port town, full of crews from various ships. We tried to stay off the streets because of being constantly accosted by prostitutes. It was also full of conmen. The strike finally ended after a month and we could begin our voyage to Australia via the Panama Canal.

We boarded L'Eridan and had the most awful kind of accommodation you could imagine, down in the cargo hold which had been converted into a bunk house. We were located at the front of the ship and it was the worst place when the seas were rough. Fortunately, we stopped in some interesting places along the way. As this was a French boat, we visited various French colonies, most of which produced tea and coffee beans.

After going through the canal where ships had to be raised because of the change in ocean height, we headed to Papeete, Tahiti for a few days. Our visit was wonderful and eye opening.

## LEAVING FOR AUSTRALIA

The native girls were very friendly. Music blared out of one cabaret with every second tune a repeat of the previous one. We watched out for each other as we had been warned about venereal disease. I tried my very first milkshake and I remember buying bananas for next to nothing.

Our next stop was Noumea in New Caledonia where we had a very different experience. After a few days we left for Sydney. The journey was incredibly rough and I was violently seasick.

We finally arrived in Sydney on January 19<sup>th</sup> 1949, after 60 days at sea. The boat docked at Circular Quay where we were welcomed by a Jewish Welfare Society representative, Mr Absatz, who gave us our destinations. I was very pleased to be assigned to Melbourne with Stefan Begleiter, Charlie Spicer and Sam Susskind. Two or three of us went to Brisbane and a few were to stay in Sydney. Gabriel Rose was sent to Brisbane, but he was very unhappy there and a few months later he came to Melbourne off his own bat.

The Brisbane and Sydney boys left and the remainder of us spent another night on the ship, which gave us the chance to enjoy the local scenery. We walked the streets of Sydney and I didn't have one penny in my pocket. My tongue was hanging out for a drink. A German fellow had plenty of money and gave me four shillings for a drink. I remember later seeing him in Melbourne and offering him the four shillings. We laughed about it.

The next day our group of 10 received train tickets to Melbourne. We weren't leaving until the evening, so had most of the day to explore Sydney. It was a beautiful city and we were greatly impressed, particularly with the amazing Harbour Bridge. We saw some men in white clothing on a small patch of green grass rolling black balls towards a small white ball. Little did I know that some 50 years later I would be playing that sport, lawn bowls, myself.

That night we boarded an interstate train and were told we'd have to transfer to a local train in Albury in the middle of the night and then continue to Melbourne. I remember looking out the

window and thinking how flat and uninteresting the scenery was.

Finally, after 12 hours of travel we arrived at Spencer Street Station. A lady with a big smile on her face, Mina Fink, and a Mr Lederman were waiting for us. Mrs Fink greeted us in Yiddish and English. I remember getting into her car and sitting next to her. She questioned us about our origins and asked if anyone spoke English. I told her that I did, so she started to speak to me in English.

They took us to a house in Burke Road, Camberwell where Mr and Mrs Wexler were waiting. A table was set for dinner. There were quite a few others living in the house already and they made us feel very welcome. We reunited with some of the boys from Switzerland, Joe Baker, Sam Lenga and Harry Goldab. There were young families from Russia, also sponsored by Jewish Welfare. We were taken to a large room with 11 beds spread across the floor, our temporary accommodation until we settled in to Melbourne.

We were there for a few weeks while Jewish Welfare staff found us jobs. The boys who were already working said you could make money here.

Everything was so different. We walked around Camberwell and the city at night and it was so quiet we didn't even see a dog. Even the houses were different. Someone coined the phrase we were living in 'a restaurant in a cemetery'. Many of us would have returned to Europe given the chance at that moment. I thought back to Zurich and Geneva where it was customary to walk down the street to talk to a girl. Here we felt so isolated.

Jewish Welfare knew we had nothing so gave us one pound a week as pocket money. In 1949 a pound was a reasonable amount. They also arranged for people to visit us and some girls came and organised a party.

After a few days we started to talk about getting jobs. A lot of boys had worked together and become qualified mechanics in Switzerland, but none of them were working in that industry in

## LEAVING FOR AUSTRALIA

Melbourne. They were tailors and machinists in factories. Some were working for Jewish people. Others were told it was hard to find a job without a trade, but they could get work at the Holden car factory.

I told Jewish Welfare I had trained as an electrician and that I didn't want to work in a factory or be a tailor. They said they would enquire if a job was available with any electrical contractor companies. Fortunately, a job was available with a Mr Taft, a Jewish electrical contractor who ran Electro Mechanical Products, a company in the city which was established before the war. Mr Taft was a very nice man in his 50s. I think he came to Melbourne after the Russian Revolution. He interviewed me and promised to help me obtain a temporary licence I could use until I was qualified. I had to study at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) once a week for my licence.

I began work for seven pounds a week, which was above award. It was the first time I had ever earned money. I didn't have anything suitable to wear and I recall buying a shirt with a detachable collar that could be washed and put back the next day. The foreman was a German Jew who wasn't a pleasant character. On my first day I met an Australian fellow, Barney Oberman, who took me under his wing. He couldn't speak a word of Yiddish; he was a real Aussie Jew. His family was originally from Israel. They owned a fruit store and every morning he brought a banana to work for me.

I was used to Europe where everything was metric. Switzerland was much more sophisticated and advanced in electronics; 1949 Australia was primitive by comparison. The techniques were different and it wasn't easy for a young tradesman like me. Mr Taft wanted to pay me wages, but I felt like I wasn't pulling my weight because I was still learning. I remember them sending me for a few days to do a job for a Jewish man who was establishing a biscuit factory. He had been in Switzerland after the war and came here two or three years earlier. He started to build his factory

**International Certificate of Vaccination against Smallpox**

This is to certify that Zylberman Max  
(age: 22 sex: M), whose signature appears below, has this day been vaccinated  
by me against smallpox. (Origin and Batch No. of vaccine) Berna 861/4788)

Signature of vaccinator: D. Clupay  
Official position: D<sup>r</sup> ENGELSON  
Place: GENEVE Date: 22 9 48

Signature of person vaccinated: Max Zylberman  
Home address: 30 Cornette Genève

IMPORTANT: In the case of primary vaccination, the person vaccinated should be warned to report to a medical practitioner between the fifth and 11th day, in order that the result of the vaccination may be recorded on this certificate. In the case of revaccination, the person should report within 48 hours for first inspection in order that any immune reaction which has developed may be recorded.

---

**This is to certify that the above vaccination was inspected by me on the date(s) and with the result(s) shown hereunder:**

Date of inspection: 24 9 48 Result: Reaction of immunity

Signature of Doctor: D. Clupay  
Official position: D<sup>r</sup> ENGELSON  
Place: GENEVE Date: 24 9 48

\* Use one of the following terms in stating the result, etc.—'Reaction of immunity', 'Accelerated Reaction (convalescence)', 'Typical primary vaccination'. A certificate of 'No reaction' will not be accepted.

Signature of person vaccinated: Max Zylberman

N.B. This certificate is not valid for more than 3 years from date of issue.

**International Certificate of Inoculation against Typhus Fever**

This is to certify that Zylberman Max  
(age: 22 sex: M), whose signature appears below, was on the dates indicated inoculated against typhus fever.

Date	Origin	Lot No. & Qty	Signature	Inoculating officer	Official position
<u>22.9.48</u>	<u>Berna</u>	<u>4564</u>	<u>D. Clupay</u>	<u>D<sup>r</sup> ENGELSON</u>	<u>10, Bd James Fazy GENEVE</u>
<u>27.9.48</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>D. Clupay</u>		

Signature of person inoculated: Zylberman Max Date: 22.9.48  
Home address: 30 Cornette Genève  
N.B. This certificate is not valid for more than one year from date of issue. — Reinoculations are to be entered on pages 2-11.

---

**International Certificate of Inoculation against Cholera**

This is to certify that Zylberman Max  
(age: 22 sex: M), whose signature appears below, was on the dates indicated inoculated against cholera.

Date	Origin	Lot No. & Qty	Signature	Inoculating officer	Official position
<u>7.10.48</u>	<u>Berna</u>	<u>4323</u>	<u>D. Clupay</u>	<u>D<sup>r</sup> ENGELSON</u>	<u>10, Bd James Fazy GENEVE</u>
<u>12.10.48</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>D. Clupay</u>		

Signature of person inoculated: Zylberman Max Date: 7.10.48  
Home address: 30 Cornette Genève  
N.B. This certificate is not valid for more than six months from date of issue. — Reinoculations are to be entered on pages 2-11.

*Max's International Certificate of Vaccination from the World Health Organisation*

**Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes**  
**FICHE D'IDENTITE INDIVIDUELLE**

PAQUEBOT s/s ERIDAN Départ le 25.10.1948

Passager de 3 classe

DESTINATION Australie

NOM (en lettres majuscules) ZILBERMAN

PRENOMS Max

DATE & LIEU DE NAISSANCE Lods 13.2.1926

NATIONALITE Apatride

PROFESSION Ecolier

ADRESSE en FRANCE 63, rue Spontini Paris

ADRESSE à DESTINATION Melbourne

PASSEPORT No 237 émis à Berna 30.6.1947  
date d'émission .....

ENFANTS de moins de 15 ans (à porter sur la fiche de la mère)

Prénoms et âge .....

Signature: Max Zylberman

Paris, le 20.10.1948

Visa de Transit No 21439  
Consul Gen de France Genève  
11.7.1949

**Visa / Visas / Visti**

In jedem Visum ist der Name des Inhabers zu erwähnen.  
Reproduire dans chaque visa le nom du titulaire.  
Menzionare in ogni visto il cognome del titolare.

M. Max Zylberman

**BRITISH CONSULATE GENEVA**

Date 27 October 1948 No 4725

Visa for Australia

Landing permit No C. 5055  
dated 1.7.48

Signature M. 10001 - Nylon  
for M. CONSUL

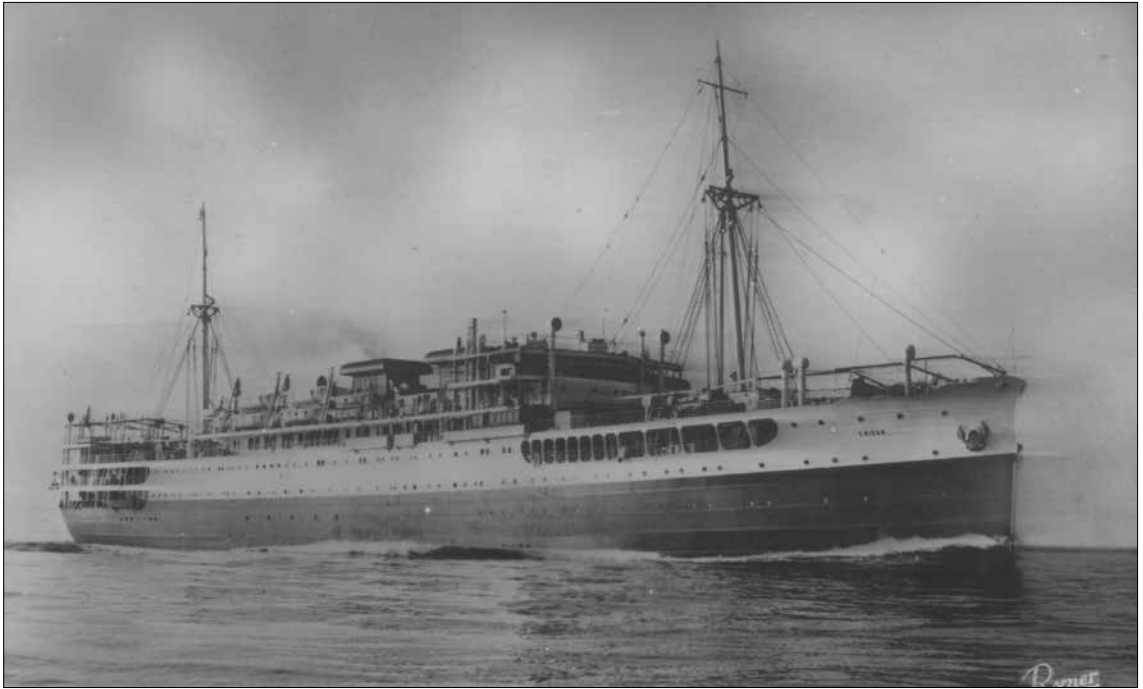
**GOOD FOR SINGLE JOURNEY ONLY**

Vaccination certificate film produced

CONSULAR SERVICE GENEVE

*Max's ID card for travel to Australia and his Australian visa issued in Geneva, 1948*





*SS L'Eridan, the ship on which Max travelled to Australia*



*Max (far right in Panama hat) in Tahiti en route to Australia*



## MARCH INTO LIFE

and hired Mr Taft's company to do the electrical wiring, but I was very inexperienced and I struggled with the job. I was very disappointed when the man complained to my boss about me even though he could see I was trying my best.

Working for Mr Taft was interesting. I was able to work in different factories and houses. I became very friendly with an Australian boy of about my age. One thing particularly struck me about him. We were eating lunch one day and when he finished he took out his teeth, without any inhibitions. He was only 21 and had two sets of dentures! I was shocked. How was this possible? He told me he had pyrea (gum disease) and the dentist said it could be treated, but he wanted them pulled out. That was the attitude. I remember other young Australians with false teeth. They had very bad teeth in those days and the tendency was to pull them out rather than treat them.

My good friend and workmate Barney had a habit of not putting his tools and materials away. One day I tripped over one of his tools and badly cut one of my toes. I was rushed to hospital to have stitches and missed a few days work. He was very apologetic and of course I forgave him.

I stayed with the Tafts for a while before joining Australian Paper Mills (APM), a big factory in Fairfield, where I worked for nearly three years. It was a better job with more money. I worked a lot of overtime on weekends. I remember an apprentice who had never met a foreigner. It was the 1950s and he'd never met a foreigner!

Jewish Welfare found me a new home in Kew with a family named Zilberman (no relation), which is why they chose me. They had arrived in Australia one or two years before me and were already in business. They had a flat with a room to let. I lived there for about a year, but moved out when the wife became pregnant and needed my room. I lived close to work and often met my friends in the city at a first-floor restaurant in Little Collins Street where we would eat a very good meal for two or three shillings. After

## LEAVING FOR AUSTRALIA

that we'd usually go to the pictures.

I remember going to my first Jewish dance at the Samuel Meyers Hall at St Kilda synagogue. The first thing we did was look at the girls. Then the music started to play and it was the 50/50 dance, an old-time dance where people changed partners like a barn dance. What was this? We'd never seen it before. In Europe we danced the tango and the foxtrot. We also went to the Kadimah and met more Jewish girls.

Coming from Switzerland my first reaction was that Melbourne reminded me of a small province. Everything was provincial because Australia was so far away. People here mixed in small crowds and it was difficult for us to find common ground. A lot of the young Australians were condescending towards us because we couldn't speak English.

Mrs Fink had a holiday house in Frankston and one Sunday we caught the train there to spend the day at the beach and have dinner. Some girls came with their parents. I don't want to mention names, but most of them were from rich homes. After a dance we would always say thank you; we were so polite. But Australian customs were very different. Firstly we were always introduced by first names, while we were used to Mr and Mrs. In Europe we would only know each other by first names when we had become close. But after a while we saw this was a more egalitarian society and certain things began to appeal.

There were class distinctions in Europe. If you were a tailor it was very hard to become a doctor. And a European doctor would never socialise with a tailor. But here you went to a party and one fellow could be a boot maker and other could be a professor and they would talk to each other.

When we began mixing with the local Jewish community there was another obvious distinction between those who arrived before the war and those who came after. The pre-war immigrants found it very hard to comprehend what we'd been through, even though

## MARCH INTO LIFE

a lot of them had lost close family themselves. The Australian Jews who had been here for generations found it very hard to relate to us. There were often disappointments with some social activities, so we tended to stick with each other. Maybe that's why we stayed such close friends.

In the meantime, I was planning to bring Jadzia and her husband to Australia from Italy and was regularly in touch with Jewish Welfare for help. Finally, I managed to obtain a permit and they arrived in January 1950. They couldn't speak much English, but my brother-in-law was an accomplished knitter and got work immediately. I remember taking my sister to a Jewish clothing manufacturer in Flinders Street who gave her a job.

After some weeks in Australia, Jadzia started to feel unwell. I took her to a doctor who said there was nothing to worry about and gave her some pills. When she wasn't getting better I took her to another doctor who referred her for an x-ray. A few days later the doctor gave me the shocking news that Jadzia had advanced stomach cancer, which was inoperable. He said to take her to the Royal Melbourne Hospital for treatment. I was absolutely devastated, especially after all our efforts to be together again and after surviving the horrors of war. It was such a shock. She was admitted into hospital immediately, but took a turn for the worse after only two days. They called me into her room and she passed away in my arms at the tender age of 24.

My brother-in-law ended up going to America to be with his aunt and we lost touch. We really didn't have much in common. That's how it goes sometimes. He probably remarried.

Jewish Welfare was a wonderful support in my time of anguish and grief. I was also helped by my friends who said Kaddish with me. After a while, with the help of my friends, I had no option but to carry on.

We started to explore the Jewish social scene, frequently attending dance nights. We also went to many non-Jewish functions

## LEAVING FOR AUSTRALIA

at Palm Grove in St Kilda. We would stand together sizing up the girls and the way they moved on the dance floor.

We heard about a Jewish dance hall in Elwood called Maison de Luxe that took place every Sunday night and attracted young Jewish adults from all over Melbourne. All of us Europeans thought it was unsophisticated, but still I would dance with one girl and wander around to look for another. All of a sudden I cast my eyes on a girl who stepped off the dance floor. She was wearing a tight black dress and she immediately appealed to me. I walked towards her and the closer I got the better she looked. I asked her for a dance. She had an infectious smile and clung to me. I realised immediately there was something about this girl that made me want to see her again. Her name was Dora Bender and she introduced me to her friends Ada and Bob. I asked if I could meet her again and maybe go to the pictures. She said yes.

From then on we met quite regularly. Then one day she invited me to Shabbat dinner at her home. I dressed smartly to meet her family, who had come from a small town in Poland, Lowicz. They were very lucky because they escaped Europe before the war began.

They made me feel very welcome. Dora's father Yechiel and mother Pawa Sura were Orthodox, while my family was more liberal. They ran a small grocery store in Carlton which provided a comfortable living. I don't think they were particularly happy with our relationship as they would have preferred someone Orthodox. However Dora was strong willed and she accepted my marriage proposal immediately, disregarding her family's concerns and doubts. I respected her for that.

I went to another Shabbat dinner and I asked Yechiel for Dora's hand in marriage. Yechiel expressed his concerns about how and where we would live. I told him I was already an electrical contractor with my own panel van and I made a comfortable living. Dora worked in her family business for some time, but didn't really enjoy it. After a while, she decided to quit the family

## MARCH INTO LIFE

business for a sales job at Myer.

When we got engaged I only had 80 quid to my name so we went to see David Olenski, a jeweller who was related to the Bender family, to purchase a nice ring. All the obstacles for us to get married were removed and we set the wedding date for August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1952.

We were married at the Elwood home of Max and Paula Bender, Dora's cousins. Dora's sister Minnie Elbaum and her best friend Ada Felman were bridesmaids, Chaim Jason was the best man, and Dora's niece Bronnie and Max and Paula's daughter Lynette were the young flower girls. Leo Rosner provided the entertainment with his famous piano accordion. It was a wonderful occasion.

We were offered a ground-floor flat in Shelley Street, Elwood, somehow scraping together the £500 needed to move in. We were very excited about having our own home.

We welcomed our first child Rhonda on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1954. It was one of the happiest days of my life. She had beautiful big eyes and a beaming smile and from that moment I was smitten. The minute Rhonda was born I became a real family man. I was working hard, but tried to come home in time to play with Rhonda. I especially looked forward to Friday nights when we often had dinner with the entire family.

In 1957 we celebrated another joyous occasion with the birth of Braham. The whole family was ecstatic because he was the first son and grandson and I was excited and thrilled as Braham could continue the family name.

My gratitude for the way life turned out encouraged my involvement in community activities and events. I contributed my time to many Jewish organisations, including Jewish Welfare which had looked after me so well when I arrived in Australia.

As time went on, the bonds between the Buchenwald boys became stronger as we recognised and shared the common

## LEAVING FOR AUSTRALIA

connections of our past. In 2000 we commissioned Melbourne sculptor Andrew Rogers to erect a Buchenwald monument at the Chevra Kadisha cemetery in Springvale to honour our families who did not have a final resting place. This monument symbolised family, unity, strength and survival. It has become a meeting place to honour and remember our liberation from Buchenwald on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1945. Our families would now have a place to always remember us and past family members.

In later years I decided to bring awareness to the wider community by sharing my life experiences at the Jewish Holocaust Centre. I always liked to share in front of others and was blessed with a great ability to speak on various subjects.

I think there's something important that must be mentioned. As we get older, people react to things differently. Some of my friends will still not talk about their war experiences and for many years I didn't speak about them very much either. In a way I was a mystery to my own children. It's so hard for them to relate to my childhood experiences because life has been so different for them. It took me a few years before I started to open up, which was partly in response to continual prompting by Rhonda who was always interested in my background. I'm beginning to realise some memories are fading so it's very important to talk. I didn't want to talk years ago because I felt some people focused only on their past which can be boring to people who aren't interested. It's just another story to a stranger. And I didn't want to bring trauma into my children's lives.

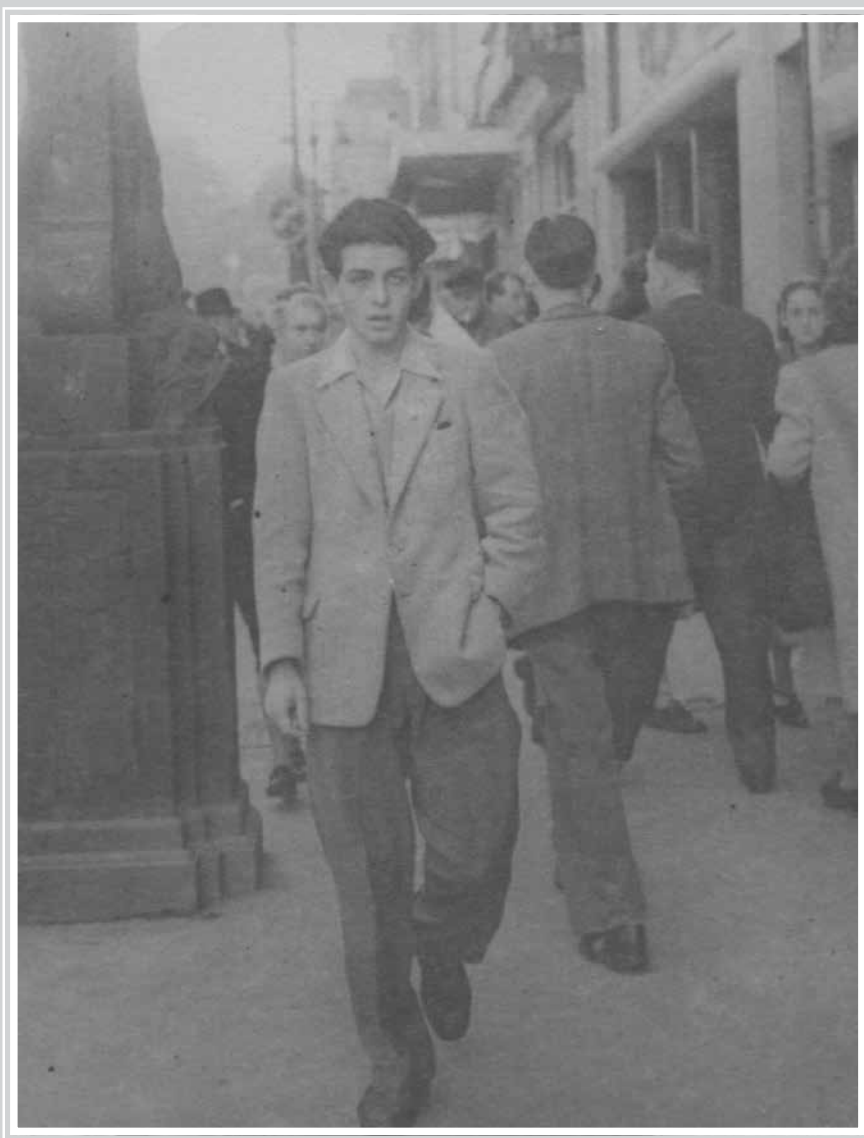
I realise now it's important. On one occasion there was something at the Holocaust Centre about the Lodz Ghetto. I went because they said they had lists of all the names of the people there. There were five volumes and I saw the names of my entire family. I was so touched that I got up and gave an impromptu speech, thanking the Centre for organising the event. That was a bit out of character for me.

## MARCH INTO LIFE

When I read and hear stories today about a young person defending their crime because of mitigating circumstances – such as a poor family life – I think about my childhood and that of my friends. On balance we had every right to become murderers due to mitigating circumstances. But we were not like that. It may be because of our upbringing or because of certain Jewish values imbued in us. There could have been some people who went off the rails, but you don't hear of them because most of us are respectable people with families. I feel I can only honour my parents by being a good person, especially as an example to my children.

In later life my priorities have been to enjoy my family and stay healthy. I consider myself very fortunate. I haven't conquered anything. I haven't done anything tremendous. I don't think I've made the history books and I haven't done anything for posterity, but as I near the end of my life, I'm starting to count my blessings. I had a wonderful marriage of 61 years, I have two beautiful children who I managed to send to a private Jewish school, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren who fill my life with such joy, happiness and pleasure. I would never have believed when I was in the concentration camps that I would live this long and achieve so much.

*Since Max finished writing his story, Billy Max was born to his oldest grandchild Adam and wife Lauren Norich and Bodhi was born to Daniel and Romy Norich.*



*Enjoying Marseilles before departure to Australia, 1948*





*Max and Dora on their wedding day, 12<sup>th</sup> August, 1952*

## A NEW LIFE

RHONDA NORICH

**I**n Australia, Dad was an electrical contractor for many years and worked on many large contracts including bowling alleys and hotels. He also imported electrical items which he sold to wholesalers. But around 1967 he needed a change and when Mum decided to open a dress shop, Colette Fashions (supposedly named after one of Dad's girlfriends), he helped her to get started while doing a bit of building on the side.

Mum and Dad were a good team in many ways. Dad was involved in buying stock as he had a good eye for fashion and together they built a successful business which lasted more than 30 years. They started with one shop in Malvern and then opened a second in Bently, where they remained until 1988. Mum was a super saleswoman and no one left the shop without purchasing something. Many of her customers would shop only at Colette Fashions, as they knew that they could always find what they needed and that Mum would assist them with enthusiasm and care. Dad did the bookkeeping in his office at the back of the shop and helped Mum and the staff whenever he was needed.

I spent many Saturday mornings and holidays working there as a teenager and I believe I inherited Mum's ability to sell and help our customers choose well. I had little choice about working there, as in those days you did what your parents asked whether you liked it or not, but I must admit I enjoyed my many years in the shop with them. Bently was booming then; it was busy and buzzing, the days were full and Mum and Dad were dynamic. I learned so much from them about dealing with different and sometimes difficult

people and the necessity for hard work and commitment.

We were fortunate to have relatives on Mum's side and were very close to our maternal grandparents Pawa and Yechiel Bender. They loved and welcomed Dad into the family and he always had a special and close relationship with my grandmother. I think the fact he had lost all of his immediate family made them share a unique and rare bond. We also had an aunt and uncle, Minnie and Leon Elbaum and cousins Bronnie (Tait) and Marlene (Zelwer).

Dad was always involved with the 'Buchenwald Boys' whose families were our family. We had no relatives on Dad's side, so we socialised with these few families, holidaying, picnicking, partying and growing up in each other's homes. We had lots in common and Mum got on brilliantly with all the wives, so being together was fun for everyone. Zelma and Moniek Rose, Rae and Charlie Spicer, Rachel and Chaim Jason, Freda and Henry Salter and Yvonne and Jack Alterwein were our close friends and we still feel a very special bond with their children whenever we see them.

The Buchenwald Boys loved to celebrate the anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald every year on April 11<sup>th</sup> and they certainly celebrated in style. The yearly ball was a much-anticipated event with everyone dressing up in their finest clothes, dancing, laughing and enjoying this special event which the Boys called their birthday. It was a busy and happy time in our lives. The Boys made sure they contributed to Israel and the community, especially during the difficult times when Israel was at war. We hosted many Buchenwald meetings in our home and the Boys were always happy to assist during good and bad times. They were especially supportive of Jewish Welfare which helped them so much when they came to Australia after the Nazi atrocities.

Dad was a gifted and confident speaker who became the unofficial speechmaker for the Buchenwald Boys at their many functions. He was a natural orator who engaged audiences of all ages, sharing his personal story as well as that of the Buchenwald

Boys with ease. In 2005, he gave the opening speech at the Buchenwald Exhibition in the Immigration Museum. His address was full of emotion and humour as he described the wonderful lives the Boys had made for themselves in Australia and their contribution to their new country. We were so proud of Dad as he shone on the podium.

Dad was a survivor guide at Melbourne's Holocaust Centre for many years and he loved to tell his story to the many visitors, especially the school groups. He often showed us the wonderful messages he received from the children and he hoped their visit would help to prevent the hatred and ignorance that often accompanied lack of knowledge. He believed if a student actually met a survivor, they would be touched by the experience and hopefully share it with their families and friends.

Dad spoke at Carlton Cemetery on *Yom Hashoah* (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and to students at Mount Scopus Memorial College and Bialik College. His talk to Jake's Grade 6 Bialik class kept the young students spellbound for two lessons. I attended when Dad spoke to Lucy and Sarah's class and was so impressed at how the children responded and was so proud to see the impact of his speech on such a keen group of children. Lucy and Sarah's 2014 year 10 class heard Dad speak at the Holocaust Centre, but by then Dad was unwell and it was difficult and emotional for all of us to watch him on stage.

When Mum and Dad retired, Dad took up bridge and bowls. Dad often said he couldn't believe he was one of those men in white, just like the bowlers he saw when he first stepped onto Australian land when his ship docked in Sydney in 1949. He was a good bowler who enjoyed the camaraderie of a team sport and looked forward to his weekly games. Dad was also a keen bridge player who regularly studied the rule book to ensure he was competitive and accurate with his 'bidding'. He often told me to persevere with bridge as it was good for the mind, but I didn't have a passion for



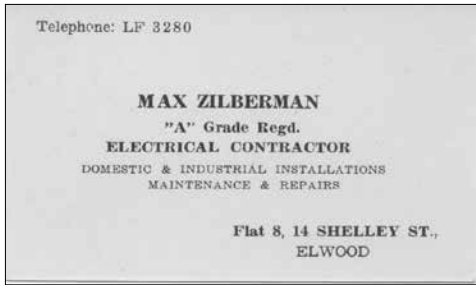
*Dora and baby Rhonda, 1954*



*Dora, 16, with her mother  
Pawa Bender, 1946*



*Rhonda and Braham, 1958*



*Max's first business card*



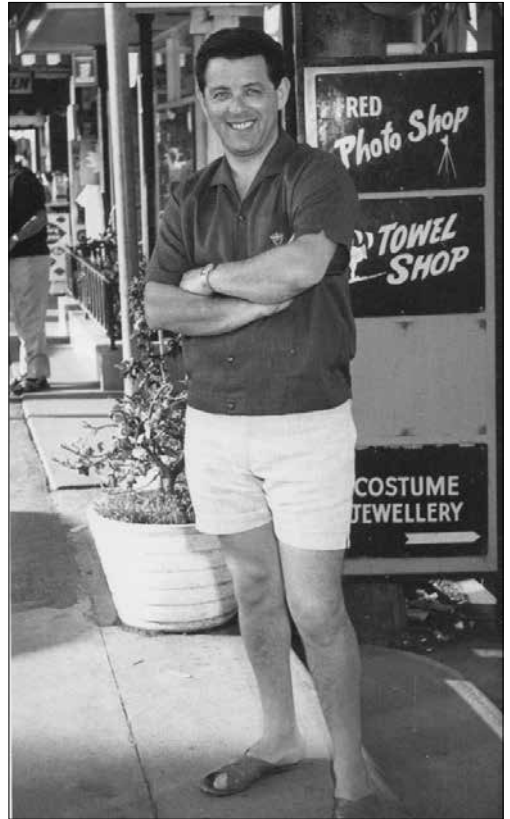
*Max, Rhonda and Braham outside the family home, 41 Thomas Street, East Brighton, 1960*



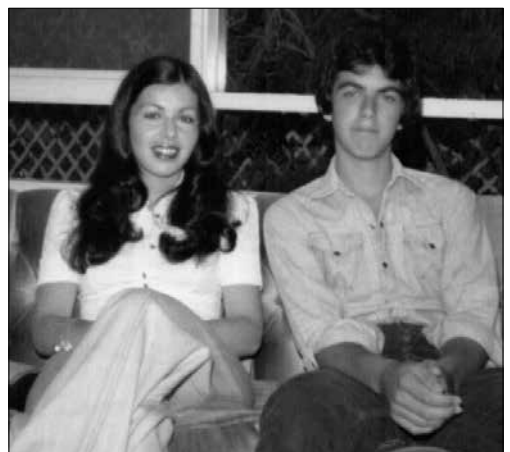
*Max and 5 year old Braham*



*Max and Dora with Braham at Habonim camp, 1968*



*Clockwise from top left:  
Braham's barmitzvah, 1970 – from  
left: Braham, Max, Rhonda and  
(seated) Dora; Max in Surfers  
Paradise; Braham and Rhonda before  
Braham went to Israel, 1975; At  
Rhonda and Leo's engagement, 1975 –  
from left: Leo, Dora, Max, Rhonda*



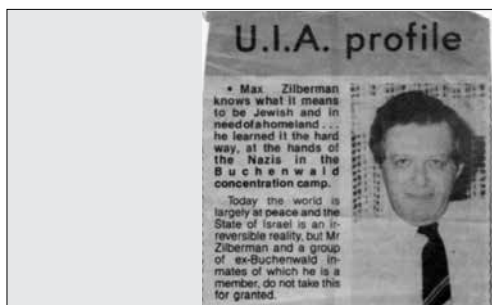




*An AJN story about the Yom Hashoa commemoration*



*Max speaks at the 1980 Yom Hashoa commemoration at Carlton Cemetery*



*Excerpt from a Australian Jewish News (AJN) story about the Buchenwald Boys' commitment to fundraising for the United Israel Appeal*



*Max (right) with Buchenwald Boys from left: Henry Salter, Szaja Chaskiel, Moniek Rose, Charlie Spicer, April 1999*





*Max (fourth from right, back row), Buchenwald Boys' 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ball, Maison De Luxe, 1965*



*Max (top left), Buchenwald Boys' 40<sup>th</sup> reunion, 1985*



*Max (centre, second back row), Buchenwald Ball, 1991*



*Buchenwald Boys' picnic, December 1995*

the game and couldn't even remember the cards, which is one of the fundamentals.

Dad also taught himself how to use the computer and spent many hours surfing the Net to research many different topics. I admired his determination to become computer literate. If he wanted to master something, he always read the instructions, was patient, logical and thorough and always worked it out. He could fix anything and loved being the family handyman. He always had the right nuts, bolts and tools and resisted calling a tradesman when he thought he could give it a go first. Mum often had to ask him to do something a few times before he did it, but eventually he solved the problem.

Dad had a wonderful curiosity for life and kept himself informed and interested in politics, history and current affairs. I could talk to him about anything and loved listening to him talk about his beautiful and happy childhood and wonderful family. Dad inherited his family's love for learning which continued until the very end. His knowledge of world history and recall for detail was incredible. He absorbed everything and we would laugh when he sang the songs he learned as a little boy off by heart. I sing the same songs to my grandchildren and remind them that Poppa sang them to me.

He had a special collection of leather-bound classic books that took pride of place on his bookshelf. They were the stories he read as a child. He loved that I also read them when I was about 12 and he believed a home should be filled with books and music.

Dad and Mum's joy was their children and grandchildren. They loved and respected my husband Leo and Braham's wife Andrea and made them feel welcome and part of the clan from day one. They were both interested and involved grandparents and spent many wonderful and happy times with all their grandkids, together and individually. They were open and broadminded and you could tell them anything; they did not judge or give too many opinions. They were proud of their children and grandchildren and were ardent fans

at any school or sporting activity. My two sons Adam and Daniel were very close to Mum and Dad and spent a lot of time with them during holidays and whenever Leo and I were overseas. They remember those times fondly. Dad had a way with young people, relating to them on their level and able to throw in a suggestion that resonated without being intrusive or opinionated. I always admired that about him. Braham's four kids, Sophie, Jake, Lucy and Sarah, came along a lot later than my two, so Mum and Dad, already retired, were able to spend a lot of time with them. They were all very close and loved spending time with Nanny and Poppa.

Mum and Dad's last few years were not always easy. Mum suffered ill health for many years and after they retired she was unable to do the things they had planned. Dad was the most wonderful and devoted carer to Mum, doing whatever was needed to make her comfortable and happy. He never complained and just did what had to be done. It was a pleasure to watch his dedication and love and Mum's appreciation was obvious. Dad was a fantastic role model. We saw his no-nonsense attitude come to the fore. He always said that if their roles were reversed, Mum would do the same. They were an amazing and devoted couple who held hands and showed their love until Mum passed away on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013.

Dad had a passion for classical music and opera his whole life. When Braham and I were very little, he decided to buy a violin and hoped one of us would play. Braham had a few lessons, but wasn't really excited by the instrument and preferred more modern music, so the violin sat unused for many years. The violin reappeared when my boys arrived, but to no avail, his dream of a talented, musical grandchild was not to be. Then Andrea produced four gifted children, but again the violin lay dormant. Finally, Lauren and Adam produced Dad's first great-grandson, Toby. Dad was so happy and proud. Perhaps Toby might love the violin. He took his old violin to a violin shop whose owner agreed to swap the sad, old and worn violin for a brand new little one for Toby to play.

## MARCH INTO LIFE

Hopefully Dad's dream will be fulfilled one day soon.

Amazingly, at the age of 88, Dad decided he'd waited long enough for a family member to play and decided to take lessons himself. I organised a wonderful young teacher and he loved her and the lessons. I cried when I saw the look of joy on his face as he played Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. Dad hoped to play the Buchenwald song at the 70<sup>th</sup> Buchenwald Ball, but sadly he didn't make it.

The name of this book *March into Life* comes from a friendship he made with a musician he met in Zurich after the war. Dad hummed the tune and his friend wrote the music for him. He kept the musical score, which is included in this book. Dad's love for classical music was evident throughout my life. He always laughed at the rock music I enjoyed and said it would never last and be remembered like Beethoven or Mozart. He was in awe of Andre Rieu and would often sit with Mum to watch this wonderful violinist perform in the most beautiful cities in Europe. I grew to enjoy the violin and classical music when I sat with my parents and shared their enjoyment.

Dad managed to pick himself up a little after mum passed away, but his health was failing. He started to consider the next stage of his life and as always was logical and sensible. He worked hard to finish this book and then decided to move into a retirement home, where a few of his friends had recently relocated. It was a big decision which he made with determination and a no-nonsense attitude. He believed it was the right thing to do; that he needed to have more company and care at hand if needed. Sadly, this occurred much quicker than anyone thought. It was only four weeks from the day he moved in until the day he passed away. It was a shock to us all, but thankfully he did not linger. He was able to say and hear all the things he wanted and all who loved him were with him at the end.

Dad never took anything for granted and appreciated everything life offered. He always said he was the luckiest man in the world

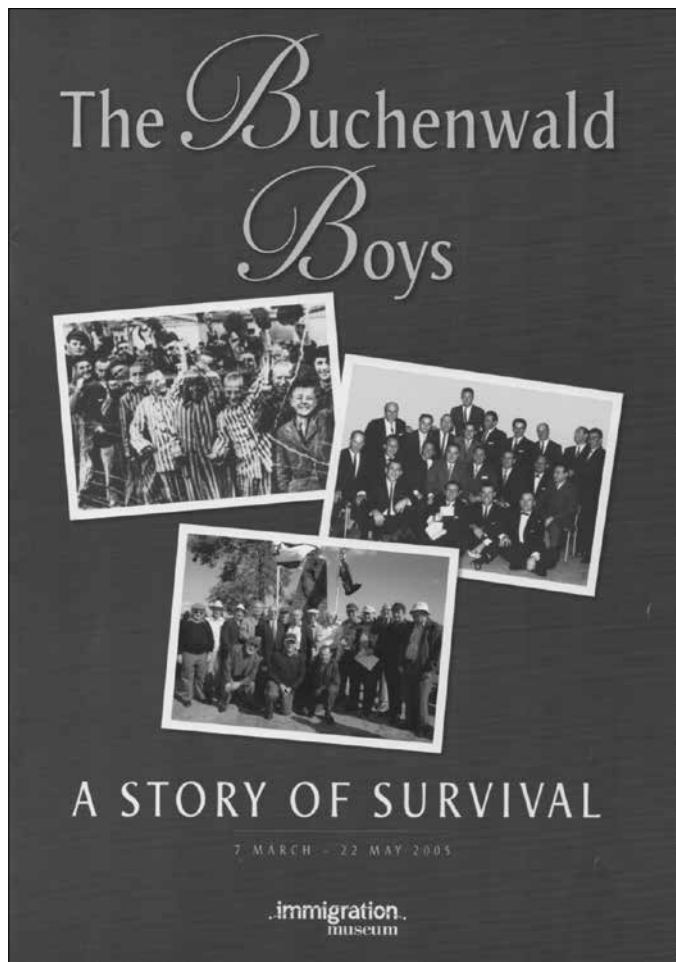
## A NEW LIFE

and never dreamt he would have such a beautiful family, after the horrors and loss he suffered. His optimism was an incredible example to us all and the smile on his face when he was with his family will always stay with me. He taught us all about right and wrong and how important it was to listen and learn; that it was not always necessary to speak or offer an opinion unless asked. He was a wise man.

A life well lived by a man who left his mark on many, especially his loving family.



*Top left: The Buchenwald Monument erected at Springvale Cemetery in 2000; Top right: Max addresses the Buchenwald Boys' commemoration, April 2008*



*Catalogue from the Buchenwald Boys exhibition,  
A Story of Survival held at the Immigration  
Museum, 2008*



*Max (third from left, front row), Buchenwald dinner,  
Armada Bowling Club, April, 2007*

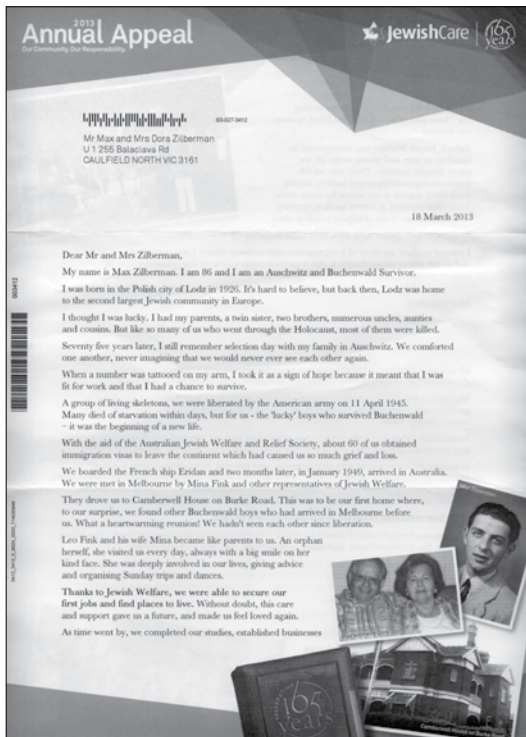


*Max, Rhonda and Adam at  
the Immigration Museum  
exhibition*



*The bookmark  
Max gave to  
school children  
who visited the  
JHC where he  
was a survivor  
guide*





*Jewish Care Victoria's 2013 appeal letter containing Max's story which headlined the campaign.*



*AJN story about the '68 years after liberation' anniversary*



*Max (second from left) with Buchenwald Boys, '68 years after liberation' event, Monash University, 2013*





*Max (with granddaughter Sophie) meets his cousin Roni Peled for the first time, Kibbutz Ramat Yochanan, Israel.*

## FINDING LOST FAMILY

BRAHAM ZILBERMAN

‘**Y**ES, YES, YES!!! 52 STRELENHNER STREET IS THE ADDRESS’. I got so excited when I read your latest message I nearly fell off my chair.’ Dad couldn’t contain his excitement after receiving a message from a researcher of the ‘Zilberman’ family living in Israel that confirmed they were indeed a family member.

Let me start at the beginning of this important event in Dad’s and our family’s lives.

Dad had been searching for family members all his adult life without success, but getting his first computer in the mid-1970s opened up a whole new world. Dad was not scared of new technology; in fact, he embraced it. Often he could operate this new machine himself, but when he couldn’t, it didn’t matter because he always had his number one grandson Adam to call to fix anything and explain how the bloody thing worked. ‘He’s such a smart boy,’ Dad used to say to me, ‘he can do anything on a computer.’ Dad would call Adam late at night and he would always trudge over to help his Poppa work out what was wrong. (‘You need paper in the printer to print something poppa,’ Adam would often tell him.)

Dad was on the computer for several hours nearly every day. When I visited my parents, found mum at the kitchen table and asked where Dad was, she invariably answered, ‘He’s on the bloody computer again.’ When I went into his study to say hello, he would regale me about the wonderful things he discovered that day on the Internet. Some of the topics he loved to research involved

## MARCH INTO LIFE

Poland, especially his birth city Lodz; its famous people, sights and landmarks. Often he would also be listening to a Lodz radio station ('It's snowing today in Lodz, Braham'). Of course I was absolutely fascinated to be able to keep up with the Lodz weather report. 'I'll be sure to take my gumboots if I go there,' I replied.

Dad's pet project was Jewish genealogy. I know deep down he really wanted to connect with some long lost relative who would unlock the secret of his family history. I believe his deep yearning to find out what happened to his father and two brothers was a constant pull on his heartstrings, an itch that could not be scratched. The Jewish genealogy website took up many hours of his time and he tackled it with relish, always with the hope of finding some Zilberman link.

So it was on September 30, 2003 that Dad sent an email to a woman in Israel called Roni Peled who was researching the name Zylberman from Lodz:

**From:** [Max Zilberman](#)

**To:** [Roni, Yotam & family Peled](#)

**Sent:** Tuesday, September 30, 2003 4:46 PM

**Subject:** Zylberman

*Dear Roni Peled,*

*Got your name as a researcher for the name Zylberman from Lodz (last update 27th Sep 2003). Well, my name is Max (Maks ) Zylberman. I was born in Lodz (13/2/26). We lived at Sienkiewicza 61 until the beginning of the war, then in Ghetto at Gnieznienska 17, until August 1944, when we were deported. I was in the Ghetto with my father Abram, mother Regina (born Zandberg), brother Cheniek and sister Jadzia. One brother Mietek left for Russia in 1939. I was separated from my father and brother in Auschwitz. My mother and*

## FINDING LOST FAMILY

*sister survived the war, but have since passed away. Never heard again about my brother in Russia. Your assistance in providing some information or locating somebody would be greatly appreciated.*

*With warm greetings.*

*Max Zilberman (Maks Zylberman)*

Roni replied to Dad's email on October 1, 2003. Her English was not always the best.

**From:** [Roni, Yotam & family Peled](#)

**To:** [Max Zilberman](#)

**Sent:** Wednesday, October 01, 2003 6:16 AM

**Subject:** Re: Zylberman

*Dear Max,*

*I was thrilled by your e-mail and I do appreciate your willingness to expose yourself in front of a stranger. I search for my father's Zigbart Zilbermann family. My father was born in 1919 in Drezden, Germany, to Shimon and Gertrud (nee Fleischmann) Zilbermann (Zylbermann). My father has a twin brother, Harry. My grandfather Shimon (Szymon) Zilbermann (Zylbermann) was born in Lodz, Poland in 1891 and had a twin sister, Sara and a triplet who were born in 1897: Leo (Leobas), Bina (Binya) and Abram Mosze. To the best of my knowledge, Leo, his wife Rosa, (nee Shemel) and only daughter Felicitas exterminated in Auschwitz 1943. Bina married Izidor Schwartz and they had 2 children: Margot born in 1924 and Max born in 1928. The family lived in Chemnitz, Germany. The Schwartzs were deported to France and from there to Auschwitz where they were killed in 1942.*

## MARCH INTO LIFE

*I have no information as for Abram Mosses, that I hope will turn out to be your father and Sara. Do those names rings a bell to you? Are we talking about the same family? Hopefully we are. Roni was just beginning her search for Zylberman family members, but got a number of facts wrong which confused Dad and made him wary that she was related to us. However, the fact that Roni's father and uncle had come from Dresden in Germany made Dad take notice because he also had a link to the city. Everyone who knew Dad was aware of his exceptional memory. Dad recalled his father receiving a letter around 1938 (when Dad was 12) from a brother in Dresden, who had never been mentioned. Dad couldn't recall the letter's contents, but astonishingly he remembered the sender's Dresden address. How extraordinary that in the year 2003, a 77-year-old man could recall the address on the back of an envelope he saw only once 65 years earlier.*

----- Original Message -----

**From:** [Max Zilberman](#)

**To:** [Roni, Yotam & family Peled](#)

**Sent:** Friday, October 10, 2003 8:54 AM

**Subject:** Re: Zylberman

*Dear Roni,*

*YES, YES, YES!!! 52 STRELEHNER ST. IS THE ADDRESS! I got so excited when I read your latest message I nearly fell off the chair ! I remember the name of the street starting with 'St', but the rest I was not quite sure. Unfortunately, I have got no pictures, letters, or documents of any description. We were stripped of everything when we arrived in Auschwitz. I have not downloaded your family tree yet, and I hope when I do it will reveal a lot of interesting facts.*

## FINDING LOST FAMILY

*Looks like we are cousins, which is very exciting, though there are some facts that do not correspond. My auntie's name, as we knew her was Sala (may be Sara?). Her surname was Rubin and she had two sons called Aba and Mietek. I don't know if she was a twin of your father's, but I doubt my father was a triplet, I am sure I would have known that!! Another of my father's brothers lived in Sosnowiec, Poland, but I don't know anything about him. The other sister Bala, (Balcia), married name Meisner, lived in Lodz and later in Piotrkow, Poland where she was in charge of an orphanage, but had no children of her own. They were all deported to Auschwitz. The youngest brother, Izidor, lived in Lodz. I knew him, but don't know what happened to him. Looks like the two brothers who were in Dresden were your grandfather and Leo.*

*I will write again after I have looked at the family tree (which we will now be able to add too!!!). And hopefully we will be able to fill in the missing gaps in the puzzle!! It will be an important connection for all of us. Also, I would like to know if you have any photos or documents of the family.*

*Thank you for your information. It is an opening that I have been searching for a long time. Please keep me informed of any other new developments you come across. I will be in touch again soon.*

*Your friend and COUSIN*

*Max*

It was only when Dad received Roni's email mentioning the Dresden address that he was finally satisfied she was really a relative of the Zylberman family. His joy was enormous and the discovery opened up a whole world of family connections through Roni's great work. At the time, she was writing a book about the history of her four grandparents. A kibbutznik from Ramat

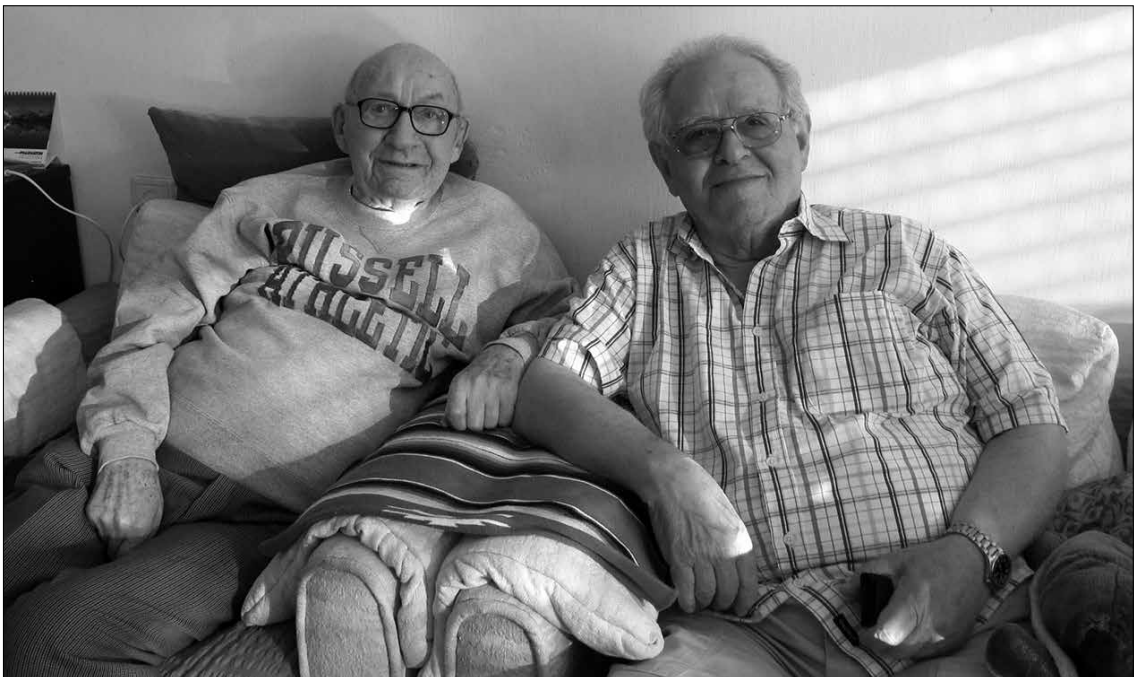
Yochanan near Haifa, Roni managed the landscaping and gardens of her kibbutz. This kept her busy during the day and at night, as I subsequently discovered, she was on the Internet researching her grandparents' families. To say Roni was obsessed with this task was an understatement. She spent constant hours through the night and weekends doing her research, emailing government agencies, Jewish agencies and any leads that she could find. She also spent many days at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem digging for more clues.

Her research lasted for three years and culminated in her fine book, *Four Clover Leaves*, tracing the histories of the Fleischmann, Blau, Singer families and our own Zilberman family. It was a labour of love for Roni, who had the book originally published in Hebrew and then translated into English. It won a prestigious Israeli literature prize. She sent us a copy and it gave our family a lot of pleasure.

I finally met Roni, her husband Yotam and their four children, Nimrod, Yoel, Yannai and Tzruya when I went to Israel in 2009. They greeted me as if I was a long lost brother (even though I was Roni's third cousin). We had been corresponding for many years and felt a closeness that can only be experienced by two parts of a family longing, searching and finally finding each other. When Dad, Rhonda, Sophie and I finally all went to Israel together and met Roni, it was a very moving moment.



*Max (left) and Buchenwald Boy Eliaz Zylberberg, with whom he spent three years in Switzerland, Tel Aviv, 2010*



*Max (right) with his first cousin Tzvi Bar-Ziv (formerly Zilberman), Haifa, 2010*





*Max (left) reminisces with old friend Aron Schlomovitz,  
Zurich, 2010.*

## MARCH OF THE LIVING

### BRAHAM ZILBERMAN

Dad had a longstanding invitation from Sue Hampel, the head of March of the Living Australia (MOTL), to be one of the Holocaust survivor guides accompanying the 2010 year 11 group to Poland and Israel. Sue, a close friend of Rhonda's, was also a daughter of a Buchenwald Boy, Andre Zelig, an old friend of Dad's. Dad had wanted to go on MOTL for many years, but couldn't leave Mum for any length of time due to her ill health.

The stars finally aligned in 2010. Sophie was in year 11 at Bialik College and keen to go on the program, arrangements were made for Mum to go into respite care at a Jewish aged care home for four weeks and Rhonda and I were excited to go and accompany Dad on the program.

Dad was 84 at this time. He was still very sharp intellectually and was very excited to go back to Poland in this educational role. In all honesty, Dad had always had a hankering to go back to Poland one more time. Unlike many of his Polish survivor contemporaries, Dad held no ill will against Poland or the Polish people. He had very fond memories of his childhood where he lived very happily for the first 13 years of his life. He was keen to show Sophie and the year 11 MOTL group his city of Lodz and impart his knowledge of pre-war Poland. He was also very keen to show Rhonda and me a more complete picture. Dad, Rhonda, Sophie and I decided to leave Australia five days before the main group so we could see Lodz through Dad's eyes at our leisure before joining the others. The four of us said goodbye to Mum and left Melbourne on Good Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2010 to begin our adventure.

## MARCH INTO LIFE

Our first stop on the way was at Zurich for 24 hours. As Dad had lived there for some time after the war, he was keen to see Zurich again. He also had one of his closest old friends, Aron Schlomowitz, still living there. Dad and Aron had been through a lot together since they were liberated from Buchenwald. Three years in Switzerland including recuperation, studies and a lot of socialising had bonded them for life. Aron had come to Melbourne several times over the years and Dad had gone to Zurich a couple of times too. They had also stayed in touch via the Internet and exchanged a lot of information, so Dad was very happy to see Aron again, quite possibly for the last time.

Aron and his wife Nira invited us to their house for dinner and we spent a lovely day with them and their daughter walking around Zurich, which was cold but bright and sunny. Dad and Aron enjoyed showing us around and pointed out some of the familiar places that they remembered from their old days together. The next day we said our goodbyes and boarded the plane to Warsaw.

We arrived in Warsaw on Easter Sunday and took a taxi to our hotel. Poland is of course a Catholic country and therefore everything was closed. We had an average meal in the hotel and went to bed, as we planned to meet early the next day with our driver who would take us to Lodz.

The next day, Easter Monday, we got up bright and early and our driver was waiting for us outside the hotel. Our first stop was to be the town of my mother's birth, Lowicz. It was about an hour and a half from Warsaw, so we thought we would stop there for a couple of hours to see its beautiful sights.

When we arrived, there were a lot of people in the central square where the main church was located. Of course, as it was Easter Monday the whole of Lowicz was practically closed and only the church showed signs of life. My mother's family, the Bender family, had lived at Mostowa 18 which was very close to the centre of town, so we strolled down to have a look and see what was there

now. Unfortunately the original house was no longer there, so we walked around the area for a couple of hours, got back in the van and said goodbye to Lowicz.

It took us another hour to get into Lodz (the driver got lost), but eventually we made it into the town. The hotel that Rhonda had booked for us looked very nice, but Dad instantly decided that he didn't want to stay there. He wanted us to stay at the famous old Grand Hotel in Piotrkowska Street, which was right in the middle of the old part of Lodz. Dad was in his element here in Lodz and absolutely took control of where we were going to stay and what we were going to do. Rhonda, Sophie and I acquiesced to his orders, so off to the Grand Hotel we went.

The Grand Hotel had certainly seen better days. Built in the 1880s, it had indeed been grand at one stage of its life, but it was sorely in need of a major renovation. No matter, Dad was happy to be staying there. It was very close to his old apartment and he told us how his oldest brother Cheniek used to go to dances there on weekends. It was great to see Dad's romantic vision of this hotel; he could only see the grandeur of its architecture and its historical significance to the city. It was again proof of Dad's positive outlook.

We had arranged a guide to meet us in the hotel. Hubert Rogozinski was a Lodz Jewish history writer, tour guide and taxi driver. He was one of the few Jews still living in Lodz. He had a great knowledge of the city's Jewish history and had written several books on Lodz from pre-war to the present day. Our only problem with Hubert was that he spoke no English. Luckily we had a Polish speaker and translator extraordinaire – Dad, whose Polish language skills were amazing. Seeing that he had rarely spoken Polish since 1945, his grasp of the language was fantastic. In fact everyone we met throughout our time in Poland commented on how amazing Dad's Polish was. So in Hubert's taxi, he would explain something to Dad and Dad would translate it to the three

of us in the back seat. It worked pretty well except when Hubert and Dad would engage in conversation in the front seat and we would scream at him, 'What did he say, what did he say?'

One of the first places Dad wanted to take us was the apartment where he was born at Mielkowskiego 23. We drove to a rather rundown part of the city and we got out of Hubert's car to walk around the courtyard of the apartment block. It looked pretty bleak. Dad told Hubert that he would really love to go into his old apartment, so Hubert, who I must say was full of chutzpah, dutifully walked upstairs to the third floor of the apartment block, knocked on the door and asked the current occupants if four Australians could come up and have a look inside the apartment. Unbelievably they agreed, so we trudged upstairs expectantly. When we got inside we were all quite surprised at what we found: only two rooms, a small kitchen, bathroom and toilet. Everything was old and in disrepair and looked as if nothing had changed for over 80 years. Dad could not believe it. He had remembered a lovely little apartment with a balcony where his mother always put flowers (there was no balcony anymore; it probably dropped off over the years); lovely furniture and beds; and a large dining room table and chairs.

Dad had lived there from his birth in 1926 until 1934 and he found it depressing that the apartment was much worse now than 80 years earlier. We thanked the occupants for allowing us to come in and made our departure. We were very happy to have had the opportunity to see the place with Dad and it is something I will never forget.

The next day Dad wanted to see where he used to live with his family in the Lodz Ghetto, also known as the Litzmannstadt Ghetto, which was situated in the old slum Baluty section of town. Dad and his family, as previously described, spent four and a half years in the ghetto. Dad wanted to see their house at Gnesen 17. Unlike most other Polish ghettos, the Lodz Ghetto is located close

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to the centre of town and many of the buildings and houses used in the ghetto are still inhabited by Poles today.

In our tour of the ghetto, Hubert stopped the car at several notable sights including The Red House which was the police station where Jews were summoned and tortured for information about hidden jewellery and property. We also saw the location of the famous bridge that separated the two parts of the ghetto.

One thing that still stands out in my memory was the aggressive nature of some Poles as we drove around the ghetto area. This area was and remains the poorest part of Lodz and the only tourists who would venture into this area I imagine would be Jews such as ourselves on a roots tour. I have a distinct memory of stopping at one particular place inside the ghetto where several older men started yelling at us in Polish. I did not understand what they said, but their tone was decidedly aggressive and I clearly heard the word 'crematoria', so I was in no doubt what they meant. Hubert quickly ushered us back into his car and we left.

On our last day in Lodz, Hubert took us to Radegast Station, the scene of Dad's final deportation to Auschwitz. There is quite a moving museum there as well as one of the original cattle trucks used for the deportation. We also visited the Bracka Street Jewish cemetery, where we have some relatives buried. We walked around there for a couple of hours. It was very moving.

We also went to see Dad's last apartment in Lodz where he lived from 1934-1940 at Sienkiewicza 61. It was a much fancier place than the first, although unfortunately we could not go inside as the occupants weren't home. A bit further up the road we went to see where Dad's father worked in the Eitingon Brothers factory at No. 82. We also enjoyed walking around town with Dad as he pointed out various buildings that had meant something to him: his grandfather's house, an ice-cream shop, a cinema. He also showed us an apartment block at Pomorska 12, near the corner of Kilinskiego, which had belonged to his grandfather. It was now



*Sophie and Max outside Auschwitz, 2010*



*From left: Rhonda, Max, Sophie and Braham on the march  
from Auschwitz to Birkenau, 2010*



*Max outside his childhood apartment block at Mielczarskiego 23*



*The external view of the family's third-floor apartment.*



*Max climbs the stairs to the apartment, 2010.*



## MARCH INTO LIFE

a dilapidated block of flats, but in a great position in town and Dad wondered if he should attempt to claim restitution from the government for this apartment block as the sole survivor of his family. We later made some enquiries, but decided not to pursue the matter.

The next day we left Lodz. It would be the last time that Dad would ever set foot in the city of his birth, but he was extremely glad he could see those sights that had meant so much to him as a small boy one more time. As for Rhonda, Sophie and myself, we felt extremely privileged to have had the opportunity of seeing Lodz through Dad's eyes and the way he made it come alive for us.

Hubert had been a fantastic guide and agreed to drive us down to Krakow to meet up with the MOTL group. Dad had been particularly impressed by his knowledge and friendly manner and they promised to keep in touch. Hubert gave us the book he wrote on the Jewish history of Lodz. We said our final goodbyes when he dropped us off at the hotel in Krakow.

We arrived in Krakow on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> April to meet up with the MOTL group which was arriving later that afternoon.

We had a couple of hours to kill, so we checked into our hotel and then went for a walk around old Krakow, running into our old friends Rita and Bill Ross, their son Phillip and his wife Tacye. Rita and Bill were the other survivors who were accompanying the MOTL group. I was very happy about this as I had known them my whole life. Phillip and I grew up close friends. Rita and Bill had both been on the MOTL program three times before, so they were very experienced and knew exactly what to expect.

The program began later that afternoon when we met up with the group and its leaders. The head educator was Johnny Baker. Our family had known Johnny's family all our lives as Johnny's father Yossel was also a Buchenwald Boy and he and Dad had been friends since after the war in Switzerland. Johnny knew Dad would be a great guide for the group as he had heard him speak

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many times before at Buchenwald functions.

The first three days of MOTL were spent touring around Krakow, seeing the Jewish historical sights and having many serious group discussions. As well as discussing pre-war Jewish life, we also visited the new Jewish community centre where we heard a lecture about the rebirth of Jewish life in Poland followed by a lively debate.

On the following Sunday we were due to visit Auschwitz, which was a short bus ride from Krakow. On the evening prior, the group was engaged in a talk to prepare the kids about what they could expect when they got there. Quite a few of them were feeling apprehensive and scared at the daunting prospect of confronting the horror of Auschwitz the next day. The group psychologist tried to pacify them.

I vividly recall Dad demanding the microphone from the psychologist as he wanted to give the kids a strong message. 'If I can do it you can do it' he said. He continued in no uncertain terms to tell the group that if he – who had experienced first hand the atrocities by the Nazis on him, his family and millions of Jews and non-Jews at Auschwitz – could return to that godforsaken place, then these Australian Jewish kids could summon the inner strength needed to go there. It was quite inspirational and I was extremely proud of Dad that day and the way his words were able to galvanise the group.

The next day the buses came to take us to Auschwitz. As we entered through the infamous gates it was eerily quiet and the group walked through the blocks in respectful awe of this place of death. Dad spoke about parts of the camp that he remembered as Johnny guided us through the blocks filled with suitcases, glasses, toys, shoes and other items that the Nazis stripped from their victims when they entered the camp. After spending what seemed like an eternity there, we finally left, knowing we were to return the next day to participate in the March itself. It had been a truly

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uniting experience to be there that day and I was very grateful to be sharing it with Dad, Rhonda, Sophie and the whole group.

The next day we went back to Auschwitz where we began the three-kilometre march to Birkenau, along with 10,000 other participants of all nationalities. On arriving, we walked around the camp for a while and then settled into seats to listen to the official program where several speakers spoke about their experiences as survivors. Rabbi Yisrael Lau, the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, paid homage to the Holocaust victims. After all the speeches, Dad made his way to the stage to speak to Rabbi Lau, a fellow survivor of Buchenwald who acknowledged Dad warmly.

The group then moved on to find a quiet spot in Auschwitz where some of the kids spoke poignantly about their grandparents' experiences there. Then Sophie spoke and introduced Dad to say a few words about his experiences. Dad, who never needed notes when speaking, shared his personal story: the train from Lodz, the disembarking at Auschwitz, the separation from his beloved mother and sister and the selection most probably done by Mengele. He spoke about the humiliation on seeing his father stripped naked in the line and the shaving of all the hair on his own body. He spoke about seeing his mother for the very last time; about saying goodbye to his father and brother after he had fortuitously been selected for a work detail and of how it would be the last time he ever saw them. He told his story with clarity, detail and great emotion. I don't think there was a dry eye in the group. We were all privileged to hear him.

Here is an extract of Dad's speech that day.

*I remember vividly that fateful day in August 1944 when together with my father, mother, brother Cheniek and sister Jadzia we arrived at Radegast railway station with rucksacks on our backs containing our very few possessions, destination unknown. We were given a loaf of bread by the Jewish Ghetto Police (I only saw two Germans there) and*

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*then we were herded into railway cattle wagons with little windows with barbed wire to stop you from escaping and a bucket in the corner to relieve yourself.*

*Then the train started to move. Men, women and children were packed together like sardines. It was very hot; people were crying and screaming and there was no water. I couldn't tell how long we had been travelling and then the train stopped. We could see lights, heard noises and dogs barking and suddenly the door opened and we saw Germans with batons in their hands yelling RAUS RAUS! We had arrived in Birkenau. People were jumping out of the wagons in panic. I remember my mother and sister clinging to each other and my mother waving to me and I never saw her again.*

*My father, Cheniek and I, surrounded by other men, were herded in a line and kept moving until we stopped in front of a German officer wearing glasses (possibly Joseph Mengele) who, after looking us up and down, waved us to the right. After spending a terrible night together in one of the barracks, I was separated from my father and brother and I never saw them again.*

*After having a number tattooed on my left arm, I with a group of other young Jewish prisoners left Birkenau surrounded by SS men and we were ordered to march. We marched until we came to a big gate with a sign 'ARBEIT MACHT FREI' – Work makes you free. This was Auschwitz, where we are standing today. I spent approximately two weeks inside Auschwitz and then I was sent to an agricultural camp 'Wirtschafts Hof Birkenau' (Farm Birkenau) where I was working in the fields not far from the Crematoriums where I could see the chimneys belching out their black smoke.*

*My job was to look after two horses. I attended to my work diligently in order to avoid any beatings, as I saw Germans administer terrible punishment to prisoners for the slightest neglect of their jobs.*

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*As the Russian army was approaching, the Germans forced us to leave Auschwitz/ Birkenau after Christmas 1944 and we all started to walk west towards Germany through Czechoslovakia. It was freezing and those unable to walk were shot. Finally we arrived at a railway station where we were packed like sardines into open cattle wagons. It was a hellish journey. Many people perished and those who survived ended up sitting on top of those who died. Finally, in January 1945 I arrived in Buchenwald where I endured even more terrible times until we were liberated on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1945 by the American army of General Patton. I was a living skeleton, but I had survived.*

*After I spent some time in Switzerland recuperating, I arrived in Australia in 1949 where I started a new life establishing a family with my wife, two children and six grandchildren. I consider myself a very lucky and happy man.*

This theme of Dad considering himself a very lucky man continued as we left Krakow two days later for Belzec death camp. The memorial there was amazing, as was the museum. Dad pondered that he had been very lucky to have been in the Lodz ghetto with his family for more than four years, whereas if he had been in a different time and place, he may well have been taken into a forest and shot on the spot, or taken directly to a death camp and gassed. Majdanek was the next camp we saw; more stories of death, mass exterminations and gassing.

We then drove to Lodz where the group stopped in a lovely little park in Sienkiewiczze Street, opposite the apartment where Dad had grown up. With the group sitting attentively, Dad spoke to them about his pre-war life in Lodz, where despite all the horrors he experienced, it still held a very warm place in his heart. After a few hours driving around Lodz we left with Dad knowing it would be the last time he would ever see the place of his birth.

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We drove to Warsaw to prepare to leave the next day for Israel. But unfortunately, the forces of nature stepped in to delay our departure. A volcano in Iceland with the unlikely name of Eyjafjallajokull decided to erupt a few hours before our scheduled departure from Warsaw, grounding thousands of flights across Europe. We were stranded in Poland. It was like a bad dream and the irony was inescapable. We had to spend five more days in Warsaw while the other MOTL groups, which had left the previous evening, were living it up in Israel.

Five days later, after a 13-hour bus trip from Warsaw to Budapest airport, we finally left for Israel aboard a specially-chartered El Al flight that had come to get us. A few hours later we arrived in Israel.

It was a relief and a joy to finally arrive in Israel after our emotional Poland trip. Our group had missed several MOTL events in Israel including the programs planned for Yom Hazikaron (Remembrance Day for Israel's fallen soldiers) as well as Yom Ha'atzmaut (Independence Day) when all the MOTL groups were to march down the main street of Jerusalem to the *Kotel* (Western Wall). Instead, we were eating bread rolls and marking time in Warsaw – but no matter, we were now in Israel and feeling excited.

We participated in most of the group's activities including a visit to Yad Vashem, but Dad, Rhonda and I were getting itchy feet to meet members of our newly-discovered family with whom we'd only had Internet contact. The delay in Poland forced us to rejig our travel plans in Israel and so we decided to stay an extra few days to see family and friends.

We bade farewell to the MOTL group which was returning to Australia. It had been an unforgettable experience for all of us. Dad had certainly been a star performer, showing his extraordinary memory and excellent communication skills. He related very well to the kids in the group and they treated him with great respect. Dad loved every minute and I know it gave him great pleasure to

reminisce in his later years.

We made our way up to Kibbutz Ramat Yochanan to visit our recently-found cousin Roni Peled, her husband Yotam and their family. It was really wonderful for us to meet Roni (I had briefly met her the previous year during a quick trip to Israel). Roni had searched her family history for 10 years and wrote a book, *Four Clover Leaves* about the families of her four grandparents, which includes our Zilberman family. After seven years of regular correspondence, they would finally meet in person.

Roni took us to the Haifa apartment of her uncle Tzvi Bar-Ziv (formerly Zilberman), Dad's first cousin. Tzvi and Dad's fathers were brothers. This was a very big deal for Dad because Tzvi was his closest relative. It was a beautiful meeting, though Tzvi's memory wasn't too sharp. Then 91, he had been living on a kibbutz since 1936. It was a great pity they hadn't met many years earlier, but Dad was happy just to be able to sit next to him. We also met two of Roni's siblings (another, Avi couldn't make it), the children of Tzvi's twin brother Shlomo, as well as their spouses and children. We also met Tzvi's only son Daniel who was visiting from Milan, as well as his wife and new baby. We had a wonderful day meeting the Bar-Ziv family and Roni and I stay in regular contact, sharing our latest Zilberman family discoveries – and there have been many.

While in Tel Aviv we also saw Dad's old friend Elias (Eliahu) Zylberberg. Elias, another Buchenwald Boy, was with Dad for three years in Switzerland after the war. He had always been a fervent Zionist, so when Dad and most of his mates went to Australia, Elias had always intended to go to Israel. Dad and Elias had been very close and exchanged many letters over the years. They met for the first time after Switzerland in 1975, 27 years after they were last together. I was living in Israel in 1975 and as we had no known relatives there, Dad told me to contact Elias. Even though they had not seen each other for such a long time, Elias, his lovely wife Aliza and their two sons Arik and Gadi

## MARCH OF THE LIVING

welcomed me into their family and became like my own family in Israel. I continue to visit them whenever I'm in Israel.

We enjoyed dinner at Gadi's house and spent a beautiful evening with the Zylberberg family. Dad told Eliazs about our trip back to Poland and they reminisced about the good old days in Swizerland. When they parted I'm sure they realised it would be the last time they'd see each other.

So we left Israel and returned to Melbourne after our great family adventure. Dad was so happy about the MOTL experience, our visit to Switzerland, Poland and Israel, seeing his old friends and meeting his new relatives. It was a very special trip which I know he treasured for the remainder of his life.





*Tzvi Yehuda (Leib Hirsch) Zylberman was born in Kock, Poland in 1833, the son of Chaim and Sheindel Szibrnik-Zylberman. He lived in Lodz until 1890 before moving to Zawiercie.*

*He was an*

*ardent Zionist and was one of the Polish delegates at the sixth Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland in 1903. He was a founder of Zawiercie's first synagogue and a prominent member of the community. He passed away there in 1908.*



*The gravestone of Tzvi Yehuda Zylberman located by Rhonda and Leo in the Kromolow Jewish cemetery, 2012*



*Members of the sixth Zionist Congress, Basel Switzerland, 1903  
(Tzvi has the long white beard, third from right, second back row.)*

## A FURTHER FAMILY DISCOVERY

BRAHAM ZILBERMAN

**I**n June 2012, Rhonda and husband Leo were in Poland and decided to visit a town called Zawiercie, the birthplace of Leo's mother Fela and her ancestors.

This was a coincidence as our Zilberman family also had roots in Zawiercie that Dad recalled hearing about from his father as a child and which Roni had confirmed in her research.

Rhonda and Leo's guide took them to the main Jewish cemetery, where Roni on a visit several years earlier had discovered several distant relatives buried. Rhonda and Leo located them and also discovered two gravestones of Leo's relatives.

The guide told them that five kilometres up the road, there was an older Jewish cemetery in a town called Kromolow which dated back to the 1700s, but had ceased operating in 1910. Hoping to find more of Leo's relatives, they decided it was worth a visit.

When the caretaker opened the gates, the first thing they saw were two large, prominent gravestones, still very much intact. Rhonda identified some of the Hebrew writing which was reasonably clear and was sure they were Zilberman relatives.

She sent me photos and I was able to translate the inscriptions. They were indeed the gravestones of our great-great-grandparents, Tsvi Yehuda and his wife Tauba (nee Biszke) Zylberman. What a revelation!

Roni had suspected they were buried in Zawiercie, but had not been told of the old Kromolow cemetery. When I emailed the photos to her she was very excited, as this discovery completed an important part of her research into our family as well as being historically significant.



*Max's first violin lesson June, 2014*

## A GROWING FAMILY

### GRANDCHILDREN REMEMBER



For as long as I can remember, my grandfather Poppa Max was a man on a mission; to share his story and to bring awareness to the atrocities suffered by him and so many other Holocaust survivors.

Poppa was unique in how he wanted to share his experiences through education and creating lightness from a very dark time in history. He was enthusiastic about meeting and speaking to anyone, anywhere, and opening people's hearts and minds. He faced so much, yet was seldom negative or disheartened by his experiences. Rather, he was excited about life, buoyant about humanity and wished for peace on earth.

Poppa always had time for all his grandchildren and wanted to know about each of our lives. Any time spent with Poppa and my grandmother Dora was rich with good food and good conversation. They were active grandparents and we enjoyed respectful and loving relationships. What set them apart for me was their ability to converse with us as contemporaries. I would often ask Poppa for advice because of his different perspective on things and I really admired this unique quality. Even today, I often ask myself what Poppa would do in certain situations. He remains a guiding force in my life.

Poppa was exceptionally skilled, but for me, his most inspiring quality was his boundless enthusiasm to learn - to learn anything. As computers became more commonplace, instead of shirking the new technology, Poppa faced it head on, reading book after book

## MARCH INTO LIFE

about using a computer. Until the very end, you could find him Googling possible family connections around the world, reading and evaluating potential opportunities and finding solutions to problems.

Poppa's pre-war family life was rich with cultural experiences, including music and theatre. He was always passionate about music, particularly the violin. So, at the ripe old age of 88 and after countless years of hoping someone in the family would learn the violin, he decided he would have to learn it himself. He found a teacher, dusted off his old violin and began learning and playing. This life experience epitomised my grandfather - fun, interested, unafraid, passionate and determined.

I spent the last weeks of Poppa's life transcribing his memoirs. This was an incredible time in my life. His attention to detail was unparalleled and his memory was sharp and clear. I learned so much about him in those few weeks together. He shared stories I had never heard before; about ghetto life, his family, travel, women and his hopes and dreams. Everything we shared during these last weeks will remain with me forever. His legacy is strong and profound.

This book serves as a great testament to a man who was willing to march through life with dignity and respect.

*Daniel Norich*

## A GROWING FAMILY



My grandfather Max was a remarkable man, admired and loved by all who knew him.

In recent years, Poppa enjoyed telling stories about his life. He shared fond memories of his childhood before the war. He described in amazing detail his experiences during the war and I always loved to hear him reminisce. He had a brilliant memory and I was constantly surprised by all the facts he could recall. He overcame adversity, worked hard and never complained. He proudly told of how he and Nanny built a new life and family here in Melbourne and always believed that Australia was the lucky country.

As his first grandchild, we shared a special bond and a beautiful friendship. Poppa and I enjoyed fixing and building things and were good at working with our hands. I am proud to now be the owner of all the tools he acquired throughout his life. We were both logical thinkers and enjoyed discussing many varied topics. His interests were so wide and diverse.

I admired watching Poppa teach himself how to use a computer. He adopted the new technology like a teenager, with much enthusiasm - from learning how to research and trade shares online, to finding long lost relatives throughout the world. He absorbed all the Internet had to offer. It was also inspiring to watch him write the story of his life, researching and exploring all the facts to make sure his details were accurate.

I have great memories growing up with Poppa and Nanny who were wonderful and caring grandparents. They were a big part of my life and were always interested in everything I did. Poppa had an amazing temperament. He was always able to look at situations in an optimistic and positive manner and could always see the best in people. I know our family has learned much from the way he lived his life and the way he viewed the world.

He left an amazing legacy and will always be remembered with love by us all.

*Adam Norich*

## MARCH INTO LIFE



Poppa Max. What an incredible and insightful man. I have beautiful memories of going to Nanny and Poppa's house every week and just being showered with so much love by both of them. Poppa always had incredible outlook on life; he didn't let his memories of the Holocaust affect him or his relationships in a negative way. He lived life to the fullest and had such a beautiful nature. Poppa was one of those people who could connect to people of any age and have meaningful conversations with everyone he crossed paths with. Poppa and I had a remarkable bond and I felt as though he was not just my grandfather, but also one of my best friends. Going on March of the Living in 2010 was a very special and unique experience that we got to share together, tracing back Poppa's roots. Hearing him speak about the places where he grew up and actually being there was truly spectacular and created memories that will never be forgotten.

*Sophie Zilberman*



Poppa loved the outdoors, food, family, music and life in general. He tried to teach me chess, on and off. I loved going on walks with him around Caulfield Park and talking about what was happening in the world. He was always interested in what I was doing. I only disappointed him when I never took up the violin. I can only hope to be as happy as Poppa was in his life.

*Jake Zilberman*

## A GROWING FAMILY



Poppa had many great passions in life, which I have inherited. I remember Poppa being extremely supportive of my love of basketball and he was always so interested and happy to hear about my games, win or lose. I will always remember Poppa coming to one of my games and being able to see him smiling in the stands cheering me on is something I will always cherish. I will always remember Poppa for his huge heart and his ability to make the people around him feel special. I love you Poppa.

*Lucy Zilberman*



Poppa would always be interested in my schooling and my passions. He taught me the value of education and reminded me that it was a luxury and not to take it for granted. He always wanted me to pursue my dreams and take every opportunity presented to me. He was always happy and whenever I was sad he put it in perspective and I always appreciated that. I will always value and treasure his wisdom and love.

*Sarah Zilberman*

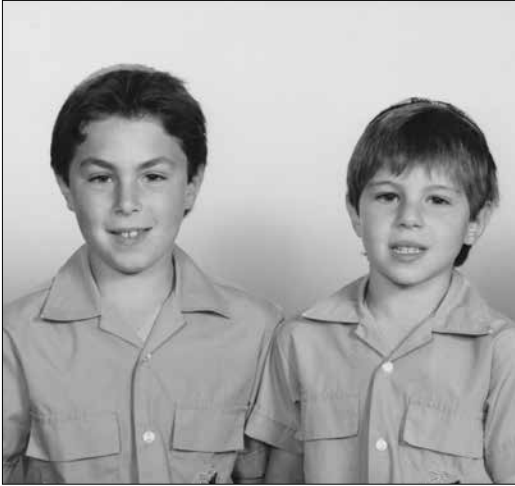




*Extended family, 1989*



*From left: Max and Dora and Leon and Minnie Elbaum celebrate Bubba's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, 1989.*



*Adam (left) and Daniel's school photo,  
1987*



*Dora and Max,  
1990*



*Andrea and Braham's call up, 1991 - from left (back): Max and Dora, Leo and Rhonda,  
Braham and Andrea; (front): Daniel, Adam.*



*Adam's Barmitzvah, 1991  
- Max and Dora*



*From left: Rhonda, Daniel,  
Adam, Leo*



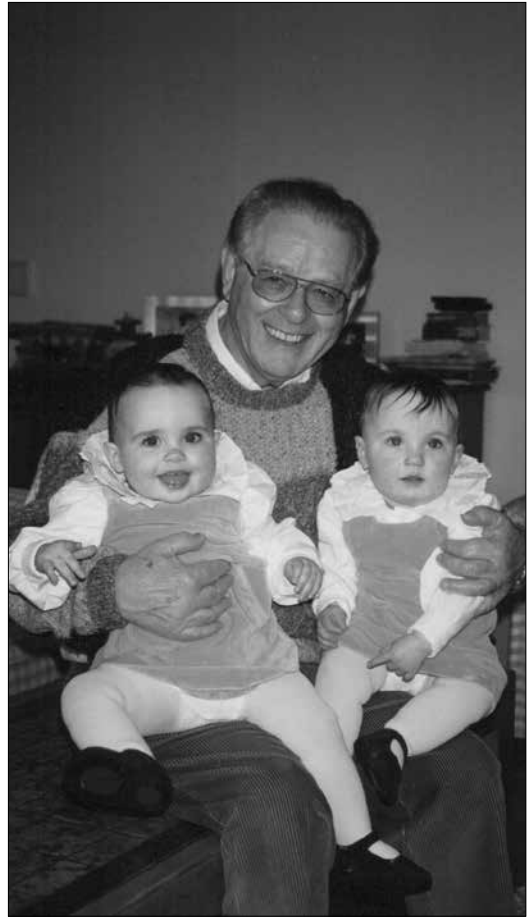
*From left (back): Braham and Andrea, Bubba, Rhonda and Leo;  
(front): Dora, Daniel, Adam, Max*



*Daniel's Barmitzvah, 1995 – from left:  
Adam, Daniel, Max*



*Max and Dora with thee-month-old  
Sophie, June 1993*



*Max with Lucy (left) and Sarah on their  
first birthdays, June 1999*



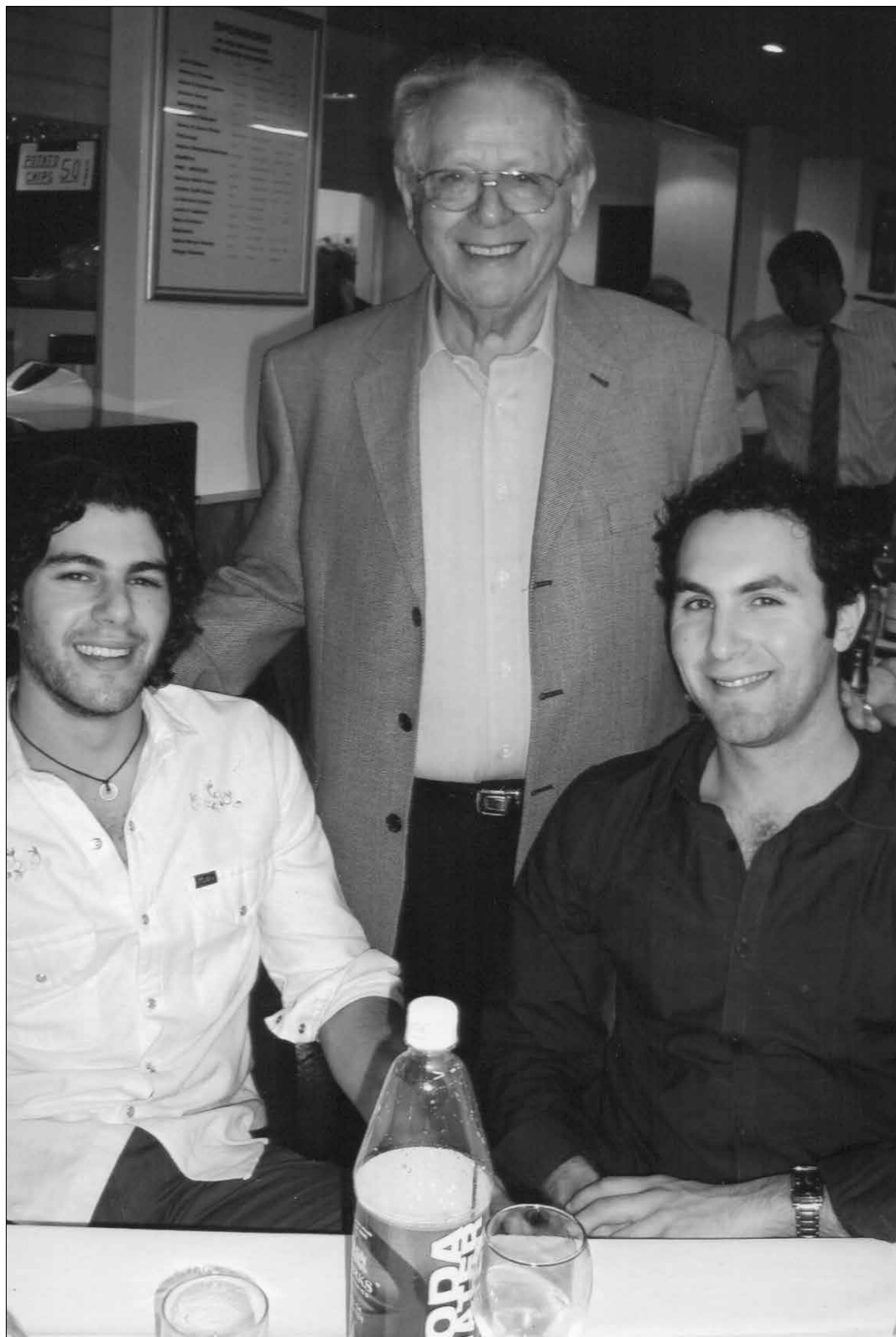
*Dora and Max (right) at combined 70th birthday party with Moniek and Zelma Rose,  
February 1996*



*Max and Dora, 2005*



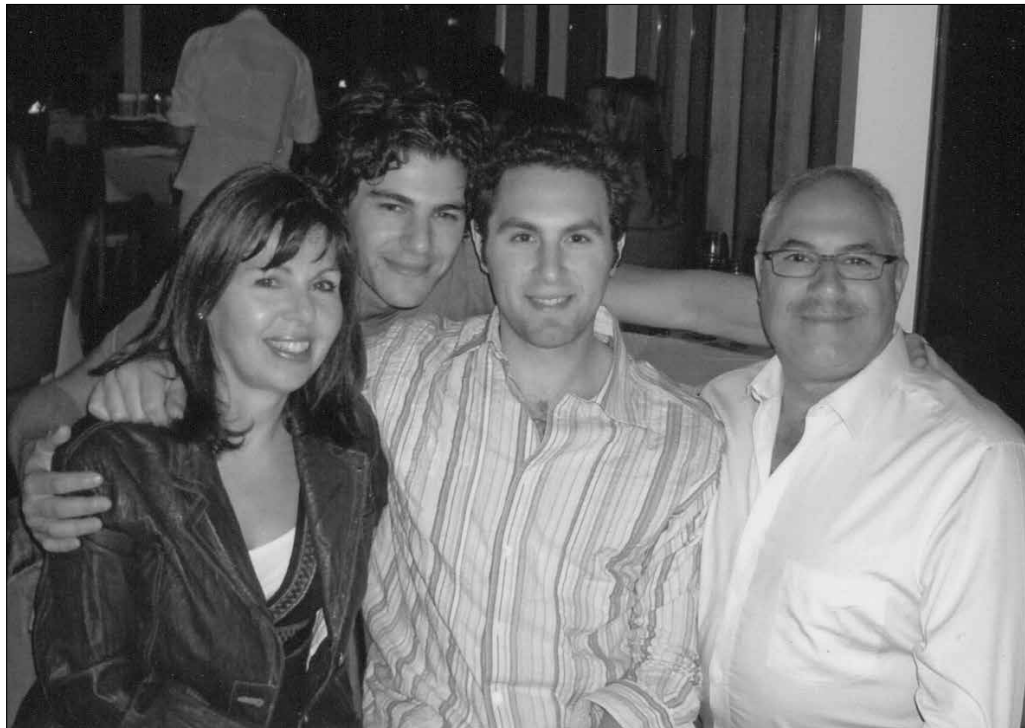
*Sophie with her Batmitzvah cake, 2005*



*From left: Daniel, Max and Adam, 2007*



*Buchenwald Boys' dinner April, 2007 - from left: Braham, Max, Rhonda*



*Adam's 29th birthday, November 2007,  
from left: Rhonda, Daniel, Adam and Leo*





*Jake's Barmitzvah, June 2008 - Max, Jake and Braham in shul*



*Jake's Barmitzvah, June 2008 – from left (back): Rhonda, Andrea, Braham, Daniel, Adam and Lauren; centre: Lucy, Sophie, Jake, Sarah; front: Leo, Dora and Max*





*Adam and Lauren's engagement, June, 2009 – from left (back): Leo, Adam and Lauren, Rhonda, Daniel, Max; front: Fela Norich (Leo's mother), Dora*



*Adam and Lauren  
at their wedding,  
24<sup>th</sup> December, 2009*



*Braham and Dora, Buchenwald Boys  
dinner, April, 2010*



*Rhonda and Max, Buchenwald Boys  
dinner, April 2010*



*The 'Royal Couple', 2011*



*Father's Day, September 2013 - Max with his grandchildren  
and great-grandson Jay*



*Jay's first birthday, January, 2014 – from left: Lauren, Adam, poppa Max holding Jay and Toby, Rhonda*



*Lauren, Adam and Toby  
(nine months), 2011*



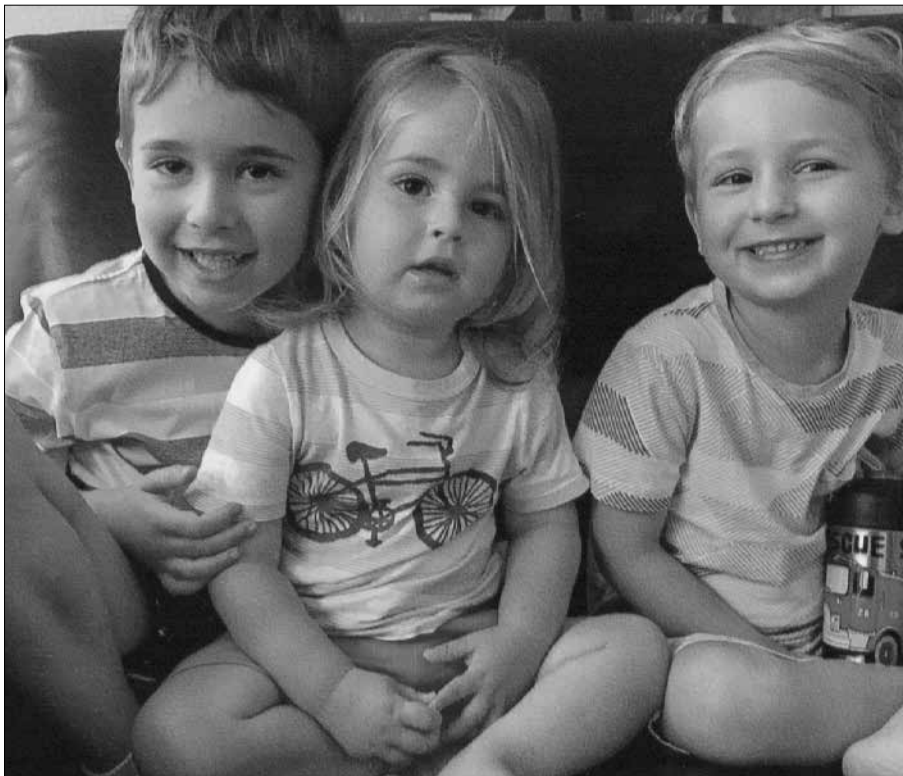
*Daniel's 30th birthday, May 2012 – from left:  
Daniel, Rhonda, Adam, Lauren and Leo*



*Daniel and Romy's wedding, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2016 —  
Norich / Zilberman families from left: Jake, Sarah, Braham, Andrea, Lucy, Sophie,  
Romy, Daniel, Rhonda, Leo, Adam, Lauren, Billy, Toby and Jay*



*Romy and Daniel on  
their wedding day*



*From left: Toby, Billy and Jay, December 2016*



*Baby Bodhi, January 2017*



*Romy, Daniel and Bodhi,  
January 2017*







# Marsch ins Leben. (Max Zilberman)



*March Into Life* is the compelling story of Max Zilberman's journey from the comfort of a loving family in pre-war Lodz, Poland, through the horror of the Lodz Ghetto, into the nightmare of Auschwitz, the Death March through Poland to Germany in the freezing winter of 1945, to yet another camp in Buchenwald. He was eventually liberated from Buchenwald in April, 1945, a starving bag of bones, aged only 19.



This book is both a testament to Max's remarkable memory and a powerful narrative in its depiction of his life from the 1930s until liberation. But more than this, it also tells of Max's rebirth in Switzerland from mid-1945 to the end of 1948, and his new life in Melbourne, Australia where he married and started a family.

*March Into Life* is a story given as a gift to Max's family as well as to the wider community who will appreciate its honesty, warmth and value as a significant historical document.

